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**Praxis & Partnerships**  
2nd International Media Literacy  
Research Symposium

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# THE JOURNAL OF MEDIA LITERACY

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## ABOUT THE JOURNAL OF MEDIA LITERACY

*The Journal of Media Literacy* (first published in 1953 as Better Broadcasts News and later as *Telemedium*, *The Journal of Media Literacy*) is published by the National Telemedia Council (NTC), the oldest ongoing media literacy education organization in the United States, having been founded in 1953.

The editors invite special guest editors for particular issues of the *Journal*.

*The Journal of Media Literacy* reflects the philosophy of NTC, which takes a positive, non-judgmental approach to media literacy education as an essential life skill for the 21st Century. The National Telemedia Council is an organization of diverse professionals interested in the field of media literacy education. NTC encourages free expression of views on all aspects of media literacy in order to encourage learning and increase growth of understanding of issues in Media Literacy. Any opinions expressed in *The Journal* or by individual members of NTC, therefore, do not necessarily represent policies or positions of the National Telemedia Council.

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# Portugal, a Place for Curiosity, Exploration, and New Understandings



**H**ow appropriate that a place such as Lisbon, Portugal, a portal to the world which inspired exploration and exchanging of cultures, would be today the site of a major international research symposium on media literacy. We want to begin by congratulating and thanking Belinha and Vitor for convening this magnificent event in such a beautiful space, bringing together researchers from 25 countries and four continents. We are also grateful for the participants of the symposium who grasped the importance of coming together in this place in this way

and the contributors who were willing to share their research in this issue of the journal.

Curiosity is the root for creativity. It is “seeing where others have not yet begun to look.” We believe this is the definition of the artist and the scientist as well. Both are inextricably connected through their common bonds of learning, testing that knowledge, and actively contributing to new knowledge and insight. It is the essence of critical thinking, media literacy, and scientific research. The goal of media literacy education is to reform traditional education into a new

way of “seeing” and the goal of research within this field is to validate that premise. Those of us in the field must never suppress curiosity, but instead encourage creative connections and new research.

These ideas must be validated, tested and retested, assessed with the tools of scientific research and within the realities of their time. The research must be rigorous, yet flexible, evolving within the culture, both locally and globally. We must draw upon all of the amazing new research being done about the brain that has implications for learning and literacy. Such research is essential. It will lead to new learning and assessment that is meaningful and authentic. Valid assessment can provide the long-sought credibility for media literacy to take its own place as a recognized legitimate department of knowledge and study in the Academy. Thus, the creation of this academic discipline will transform the way literacy is seen by all.

The challenges of defining our field and finding the parameters that we can all live within are more complicated than other academic fields. Literacy includes the whole human experience with all of its dimensions, values, identities, and a range of ideas that can reach to infinity. Once we accept these complexities, we still can move forward with research that is fluid and flexible, yet rigorous. It is not enough to observe, we have to find ways to measure. And that is a challenge we have not yet reached.

Research is never finished, but it is also never “new.” It is built upon the work and ideas of those who came before. There are time-tested basic elements of philosophy and practice that remain the same, no matter what “tool” is being used at the time. We need to have a deep understanding of our roots and maintain a steadfast adherence to the core principles and values. But research also cannot stand still. It must be flexible and ongoing, responding to the evolving world in which it lives.

Although our approaches and philosophies need

to be varied to reflect our global society, we must continue to critically observe, measure, define, practice, and share our results through convening meetings such as the one we present in this issue. NTC will

*The goal of media literacy education is to reform traditional education into a new way of “seeing” and the goal of research within this field is to validate that premise.*

continue to encourage and support events for meeting of minds, for new connections, and for creating a culture of research-oriented champions for the future of this field. ✨

Marieli Rowe  
JML EDITOR



Karen Ambrosh  
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Marieli Rowe



Karen Ambrosh

# Praxis & Partnerships: 2nd International Media Literacy Research Symposium In Lisbon, Portugal

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**Vitor Tomé, Autónoma University of Lisbon, Portugal**



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VITOR TOMÉ has a PhD in Education (2008) and a 6-year post-PhD in Communication (2018). He is a professional journalist, a teacher trainer, and a researcher currently involved in several research projects: “Digital Citizenship Education” (Council of Europe—Expert Group member); the COST Action “The Digital Literacy and Multimodal Practices of Young Children—Digilitey” (led by Sheffield University—researcher); and “Digital Citizenship Education for Democratic Participation in Odivelas” (Science and Technology Portuguese Foundation and Algarve University—coordinator). He is currently lecturing at Autónoma University of Lisbon. He has been a lecturer in Portugal (New University of Lisbon, Algarve University, Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco), Brazil (PUC-Rio) and Japan (Hosei University), and is the author of several books, book chapters, and articles in scientific journals.

**M**edia literacy education has been raised to a new level of observance and awareness since the discussion of fake news within our society. Not always for the right reason or in the way that many of us had anticipated, but it has been given life.

The qualification of the term and defining its meaning is not always necessary as people are talking about media literacy in all parts of the world. Addressing, primarily, the question of how civil society can be a part of the larger dialogue of exposing new thinking and misinformation, while also promoting an open dialogue. Researchers in this area have been studying this very fine trail of scholarship for many years. However, it is evident that the inquiry within this work is vitally important especially as it has reached national

and international attention, resonating with the political strife throughout various countries. Further, media literacy education needs to be current following the ever-evolving way that media expands, (at times diminishing), peoples’ ideas and perceptions.

The second installation of the *International Media Literacy Research Symposium* in many ways could not have been timelier with the dialogue of our time. As co-writers and partners in our own research on digital citizenship and media literacy, we have seen the lack of education in schools while also finding that teacher training and student learning reaps definitive rewards for all involved. It was with this thinking in mind that the idea of hosting a conference in Lisbon, Portugal came to fruition. In looking at the work of our own colleagues,

we could see a change in the quantity of research and in the fervor, as well as the direction of the topics.

### **1st International Media Literacy Research Symposium**

Four years prior, the first symposium took place in the United States bringing together a number of researchers from all over the world. In small and large groups, there was vibrant discussion on various topics of the time. In many ways, the discussions provided a beginning of how research within media literacy, media literacy education, digital literacy, digital citizenship, and civic media literacy education had shifted and changed. At the time, it was said,

We need more conversations and ones that tie together what we are seeing in our mediated society. Those discussions need to be transferred to research that examines how media impact society, how society impacts media, how media messages are interpreted, constructed, and reconstructed. We need to bring together people who are different stakeholders in education, policy, academia, activists, public health, and producers in both commercial and non-commercial settings. The path to research in media literacy will be varied and challenging, but for the ultimate purpose of encouraging knowledge along with critical thinking (De Abreu, 2014).

As fitting with the name, in order to make the international component more visible and viable to a greater global community, the 2nd version of the conference needed to leave the USA. Portugal was the perfect location, not just because we had the right opportunity and the right placements, but it is also one of the most unique European countries that has always opened its arms to travelers. Lisbon, Portugal, is rich with a vibrant history having been one of the richest and poorest European countries, previously governed by a communist leader until the revolution in 1974 to now a democratic society. For a visitor, coming to Lisbon is in many ways a dream because it reaches all aspects of a society.

At the same time, media literacy education has been a source of growth within the country itself.

### **A Short History of Media Literacy Education in Portugal**

- In 2001, the new National Basic Education Curriculum created three new non-disciplinary curriculum areas—project, civics, accompanied study—that could all address media education issues.
- In 2002, the subject of information and communication technologies (ICT) became integrated into the 9th grade curriculum. (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 4).
- In 2008, the Ministry of Education clarified the activities that had to be developed in the non-curricular parts of civics and project area. Throughout basic education, skills should be developed in 11 areas: media education, health and sexuality, environment, consumption, sustainability, entrepreneurship, human rights, equal opportunities, solidarity, road systems, the world of work and professions, and the European educational dimension (Ministry of Education, 2008).
- The Ministry of Education asked for a curriculum proposal for citizenship education in 2010 that, apart from involving all teachers in the training of students, proposed inserting civics in the basic curriculum and in secondary (Santos, 2011).
- In 2011, the newly created Informal Group for Media Literacy (GILM) organized in Braga the first congress titled “Literacy Media and Citizenship.” The GILM consists of a varied group of organizations:
  - Portuguese Commission of UNESCO,
  - National Council of Education (CNE),
  - Directorate General of Education (DGE),
  - Ministry of Education,
  - Portuguese Regulatory Authority for the Media (ERC),
  - Science and Technology Portuguese Foundation (FCT),
  - Media and Communications Bureau (GMCS),
  - Radio and Television of Portugal (RTP),
  - School Libraries Network (RBE), and
  - Communication and Society Research Centre at the University of Minho (Literacia, Media e Cidadania, 2011, pp. 851–852).
- Still in 2011, the National Council of Education published a text on media literacy in which it recommended to the government and parliament to:
  - guarantee “the training (technical and peda-

- gical) of teachers, heads of libraries, resource centers, and other educational agents,”
- proceed to “organizational and curricular insertion of media literacy education in citizenship education,” and
  - foster “opportunities for extra-curricular learning in media literacy education” (Silva & Santos, 2011, pp. 10–11).
- In 2012, as a subject, ICT remained instituted in the 9th grade, but now extended to the 7th and 8th grades (Ministry of Education, 2012).
  - Currently media education has four designation in the basic and secondary curriculum as the following possibilities:
    - One of the contents in the area of citizenship education, which befalls to all subjects in basic and secondary education, and also in preschool;
    - Developed in a complementary curriculum component created by the school in civics, with a set time (basic education);
    - A “corresponding offering” that integrates the curriculum and should contribute to the integral development of students in the areas of citizenship (first cycle);
    - One of seven areas proposed for development through projects and activities of “optional frequency” organized by schools; and it contributes to the “personal and social education of students” (Ministry of Education, 2013).
  - In 2016, in the Lisbon neighborhood of Odivelas, a municipal media literacy project began that included teacher training (preschool and primary school), data collection from children, families, and community, and an intervention plan based on the research results (Tomé & De Abreu, 2016).
  - In 2017, the Portuguese Ministry of Education published a new national policy on digital citizenship education that involves media literacy as one of the focal points (Tomé & De Abreu, 2017)

## 2nd International Media Literacy Research Symposium

This brings us to the 2018 research symposium where we were fortunate to have the *Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation* as our gracious host site. *Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation* was established in 1956 for the pur-

pose of fostering knowledge and raising the quality of life of persons throughout the fields of the arts, charity, science and education. We were also supported by Dra. Maria Teresa Calcada—Comissária do Plano Nacional de Leitura, and Dra. Elsa Conde—SubComissária do Plano Nacional de Leitura, as well as our on ground committee Maria José Brites (Universidade Lusófona do Porto), Paula Lopes (Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa), and Conceição Costa (Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias).

Twenty-five countries and four continents were represented suggesting that media literacy research is valued and needed around the world.

The conference commenced with our two keynote speakers:

Paul Mihailidis, Associate Professor of Civic Media and Journalism in the School of Communication at Emerson College in Boston, MA, where he teaches media literacy, civic media, and community activism and faculty chair and director of the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change.

Nico Carpentier, Professor in Media and Communication Studies at the Department of Informatics and Media of Uppsala University. He is also a Research Fellow at the Cyprus University of Technology and Loughborough University.

Their plenary discussion centered on the topic of “Civic Media Literacy and Participatory Culture” answering questions such as:

- How does civil society use online media to facilitate social engagement currently?
- What has journalism to learn from Civic Media Literacy?
- What are some effective practices for participatory citizenship and engagement in digital culture?

The exchange with the audience members was vibrant and engaging. The space provided allowed for an intimate setting and a comfortable way for an exchange of ideas to happen.



Paul Mihaildis shares an article in this journal that clarifies his thinking on the subject. Further, throughout the journal are articles of research representing the three conference strands: Media Literacy (General), Civic Participation/Participatory Culture, and Digital Citizenship.

Our hope for this symposium was to provide people a chance to extend their thinking, be reflective of the work that is in progress worldwide, and produce even more. What follows in this journal is the work of several of the participants and the current research within these three areas represented from places such as Israel, Italy, Spain, USA, Sweden, and more. ❖

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## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA LITERACY RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

# Guilty pleasure or critical discourse? Feeling our way through culture in a digital and post-logic era

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## Abstract

To undertake media education research it is necessary to embrace contradictions. Given that at the core of our work are the relations between people and their screens, when we are trying to puzzle through unexpected reactions to particular media content and technologies, we have to recognize we are dealing with the shifting tides of emotions, attitudes and behaviours on the one hand, and agency, context and occasion on the other. In this paper, we undertake a critical re-reading and interrogation of a large-scale research project conducted in Spain of over six thousand tweets in reaction to the viewing of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Members of our writing team developed the initial review of this research and developed a comparative model which evaluated the youth tweets in relation to theo-

retical work developed by academic authors (Torrego & Gutiérrez, 2016; Gutiérrez y Torrego, 2017). In general, it was found that the youth who actively participated in the Twitter responses to the films for the most part ignored the political content and educational potential, but rather focused on superficial commentary about certain scenes as well as chatter about their own setting and reactions in the moment of viewing. In this present iteration, we will interrogate those early findings in the broad frame of new media literacies and cultural studies youth research around these four key questions: 1) What are youth doing when they gather online? 2) How is the social media discourse of young people meaningful and to what extent is it a significant entry point to the worldviews of youth today? 3) What are the implications of this study for

media education in an age of participatory media? 4) Can youth transition between off hand and frivolous utterances on the one hand, and critical, sometimes non-linear, utterances on the other, especially in light of post-logic, affect-driven discourse that circulates in the cultural mainstream?

**Keywords: The Hunger Games, Twitter, social media research, virtual concourse, participatory cultures.**

*'If you've never pictured your friends in the arena, you've never been bored at school. #EnLlamas [Catching Fire]'*

*"Plot summary: Too much politics, too little gossip. #Sinsajo Parte1 [Mockingjay Part 1]."*

To undertake media education research it is necessary to embrace contradictions. Given that at the core of our work are the relations between people and their screens, when we are trying to puzzle through unexpected reactions to particular media content and technologies, we have to recognize we are dealing with the shifting tides of emotions, attitudes and behaviours on the one hand, and agency, context and occasion on the other. The young people quoted above are two respondents of a large-scale research project conducted in Spain of over six thousand tweets in reaction to the viewing of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Members of our writing team have developed an analysis of this research and compared the responses of the youth tweets to analyses written by academic authors (Torrego & Gutiérrez, 2016; Gutiérrez y Torrego, 2017). In general, it was found that the youth who actively participated in the Twitter responses to the films for the most part ignored the political content and educational potential, but rather focused on superficial commentary about certain scenes as well as chatter about their own setting and reactions in the moment of viewing. In this discussion, we will interrogate those early findings in the broad frame of new media literacies and cultural studies youth research around these four key questions: 1) What are youth doing when they gather online? 2) How is the social

media discourse of young people meaningful and to what extent is it a significant entry point to the world-views of youth today? 3) What are the implications of this study for media education in an age of participatory media? 4) Can youth transition between off hand and frivolous utterances on the one hand, and critical, sometimes non-linear, utterances on the other, especially in light of post-logic, affect-driven discourse that circulates in the cultural mainstream?

The context of *The Hunger Games* study was research on the online Twitter forums managed by the Spanish television broadcasters Antena 3 that were provided as a transmedia interactive supplement to the traditional media transmission of the individual films. A corpus of 6000 tweets by youth was captured on Tweet Archivist and analyzed for its content (Torrego-González, & Gutiérrez-Martín, 2016; Gutiérrez y Torrego, 2017). Twitter thus plays a dual role, both as a prosumer, popular cultural site, where the viewers of *The Hunger Games* trilogy interacted with the programs, responding to television prompts but inserting their own views in to a Twitter feed simultaneous to the viewing, and also a research source. In regards to the latter, the research draws on a rapidly growing social media research tradition, well modeled by projects such as Mapping Online Publics at the Queensland University of Technology <mapping-onlinepublics.net>. The Twitter data collection relied on strict monitoring of three hashtags on the dates the films were broadcast in 2014-15: #LosJuegosDelHambre (*The Hunger Games*, 2012); #EnLlamas (*The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, 2013) and #SinsajoParte1 (*The Hunger Games: Mockingjay—Part 1*, 2014). All three films were the most watched shows of the day on Spanish television, with excellent audience/share results (ranging from 3.8-4.5 million viewers). Given Twitter does not give information on user age, 1000 users were chosen at random, their profiles analyzed, and aged inferred based on other topics they posted about: school/college, family and friends, entertainment, photographs and so on. All of them were found to be youth.

Viewers were prompted by Antena3 to respond by Twitter to the films they were viewing using hashtags corresponding to the program titles. What the study of six thousand tweets revealed is that, despite the powerful political content of these programs,

young viewers who participated in this interactive component were preoccupied with superficial matters such as the banter revealed at the start of this article. In fact, only a trifling 89 tweets spoke to the political content of the programs. Most of the tweets refer to casual references to plot or character elements in the films or contextual comments of viewership such as the engrossing or emotional nature of the stories. To quote a few examples of the former: ‘#EnLlamas on TV’; ‘I love how they break Gale’s heart. Satisfied with #LosJuegosDelHambre’ [The Hunger Games]; ‘Who wouldn’t love Finnick? It’s impossible not to. #Sin-sajoParte1’; ‘The best part of the book is when they use the force field to make dinner. AND IT’S NOT IN THE FILM. #EnLlamas’. These examples are typical of the type of friendly banter common to young people hanging out watching the films together. In regards to the viewing context, we see comments such as: ‘I need

cise use of the term (Jenkins et al., 2009)—with low barriers, strong support, informal mentorship, feeling of value, and social connection—ask too much of a group of youth hanging out at home, watching TV on a school night. Likewise, terms such as ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) and ‘affinity spaces’ (Gee, 2009) do not quite fit the context of a youth online gathering sharing banter. Both terms apply, but they miss the mark suggesting levels of intentionality often absent in a youth gathering. If we move the discussion offline to the context of a street corner, park, or shopping mall, it is easy to recognize some of the random and haphazard manners through which groups form and discourses evolve. Our argument is one for virtual gathering places that are ‘virtual concourses’ (Gutiérrez y Torregó, 2018), online settings that are virtual equivalents to subway platforms or shopping malls, online gathering places where people’s lives intersect briefly, and where profound depth of conversation is possible but not likely. While the mass viewing of a pop culture favourite like the highly successful Hunger Games trilogy is an example of a fan culture (Jenkins, 1992), when the commitment to the group or the text is minimal, it is often just a fleeting concurrence. Unlike affinity spaces or communities of practice, virtual concourses do not rely on the existence, or even potential germination, of communities or interactions/relationships based on affinities between the participants having a conversation in a virtual space. Rather, they refer to spaces where youngsters gather to make meanings about and with media texts, products and practices.

Respondents to the Twitter forum on this Hunger Games trilogy viewed in Spain by an average of four million viewers are representative of youth opinion today though in relation to their role as audience members of the TV programs, not based on follow up interviews or surveys on broader topics. Thus, the view that is opened up here is partial and contextual. Nonetheless, there is considerable value in reviewing some of the more provocative tweets in relation to broader social or political trends. Here we are particularly interested in critical commentary about oppression and resistance. Many of the tweets in this category compare the fictional world of Panem to Spain, ranging from critiques of present day Spain to dystopian visions. One respondent speaks to police responses to

*Unlike affinity spaces or communities of practice, virtual concourses do not rely on the existence, or even potential germination, of communities or interactions/relationships based on affinities between the participants having a conversation in a virtual space*

to watch #EnLlamas to the end. I have a test tomorrow and I don’t know anything. If I don’t pass the test, I’ll flunk the second term’; ‘My mother’s watching #EnLlamas, I so love her’; ‘My goodness, I’m crying my eyes out with #LosJuegosDelHambre’.

In previous publications, the two authors who conducted this research study argue that many of the terms used to describe online gathering and activity of young people are too broad or particular to encompass what young people are doing when they chat online in groups such as these ones. While the term ‘participatory culture’ (Jenkins et al., 2009) is suggestive of a broad shift in communication and culture, it is often used willy-nilly to mean too many things in too many contexts. For example, while they are all participatory actions, the differences between editing a Wikipedia page, clicking a preference on a page, watching an online video and participating in an online discussion on Twitter are too great to rely solely on this term. On the other hand, the more pre-

disruption: ‘People being taken away by the police because of disobedience in #EnLlamas. Look at that! As in Spain!’ Another suggests that these films portend dystopian trends at home: #EnLlamas shows Spain in the near future...I believe.’ All of the political allusions refer exclusively to Spain, including those of the closely related category of rebellion and resistance. Thus, ‘#LosJuegosDelHambre and Les Misérables bring out the revolutionary in me. Be careful, Mr President, there could be more like me’. And, ‘there’ll always be a Dictator somewhere that deserves a Revolution to deliver #Freedom. #SinsajoParte1. #Dystopia, favourite genre.’

Despite a few samples totalling less than 100, not many of the 6000 tweets analyzed demonstrated critical consciousness of contemporary concerns around economic, racial or gender inequality. Particularly noticeable in their absence were posts that refer to the strong role of the female protagonist, Katniss, who struggles through every imaginable hardship and deceit imaginable. Even if the casting of an alluring Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss was only a marketing ploy on the part of the trilogy’s producers to draw in female readers and viewers, the character has an undeniable edge and appeal, standing up time and time to authority and oppressive people and circumstances. Thus, it is revealing that in this large sample of viewer tweets, her revolutionary potential and power is ignored. Instead, there is a celebration of the character and good looks of the male characters, typical of media pitched to young female viewers: ‘Finnick looks cute even in poisonous fog. #EnLlamas’; ‘I need a Peeta and a Finnick in my life. #EnLlamas’; ‘Finnick, darling, if you were on sale, I’d definitely buy you. #SinsajoParte1’. Similarly, when Katniss is mentioned, comments are banal and focussed on her physical appearance.

Where viewers demonstrate meta-critical awareness is in the artifice and commercial intentions of the media product itself. The *Mockingjay*—Part 1 broadcast in particular contained a high number of advertising breaks that were met with critical tweets. One viewer suggests that the advertisers themselves should be sent into the killing fields arena to get their message out: ‘Get the advertising people. Release them in the fields and cry, ‘Let the hunger games begin!’ #SinsajoParte1’. Another measures the length of the ads:

‘In the 7 minutes of the ad break, I can overthrow the Capitol on my own. #SinsajoParte1’. Yet another suggests that the real rebellion would be to get rid of the commercials all together: ‘Rebel warriors, let’s do away with commercials!! #SinsajoParte1’. These comments demonstrate the viewers’ awareness of the artifice and commercial imperative of media representation and represent one strong version of an “oppositional reading” (Hall, 1973).

As we have argued, making sense of youth voice based on an interactive Twitter forum occasioned by a television broadcaster provides only a partial view of youth participation and voice in the era of Web 2.0 and participatory culture. Nonetheless, these findings are based on a large sample and hence not to be discounted. They show that youth tend to want to engage lightheartedly and superficially about the media content, preferring rather to speak about how they feel; plot and character elements that are either cool or boring; and to critique the media form itself. To an extent, this demonstrates a preference for engaging with lived reality rather than the allegories and representations raised by the media image. The youth viewers are literally hanging out and watching TV, and these are the circumstances most shared in the virtual concourse.

Given the abundance of opportunity and the staggering quantity of media content produced interactively on a daily basis, there is plenty of evidence for researchers and pundits to point to when raising concerns about youth today. However, it bears mention that the tendency to weigh the material evidence against youth media practices is a recurring factor of adult-youth interactions. For example, in that moment in the early 1990s, just before Tim Berners-Lee introduced the WWW and when the Twitter users cited in this study were just wee twinkles in their parents’ eyes, critics were decrying the dumbing down of culture at the crucible of Bart and Homer Simpson (Hoechsmann and Poyntz, 2012). In regards to *The Hunger Games* research, we can demonstrate

*Despite a few samples totaling less than 100, not many of the 6000 tweets analyzed demonstrated critical consciousness of contemporary concerns around economic, racial or gender inequality.*

active involvement in the act of viewing and a critique of television's commercial intention. Youth viewers of The Hunger Games trilogy are indulging in guilty pleasure, spending a few moments to leave their mark in the virtual concourse but leaving the critical analysis for another day and context.

Online spaces such as Twitter are forums of contemporary culture where "spreadable media" (Jenkins et al, 2013) get transformed in a 'continuous process of repurposing and recirculation by individuals, communities, and corporations' (2013, p. 27) that is characteristic of participatory culture. These settings encourage devastating critique of media productions and personalities, and they are also the site of circulation of ironic reworkings in the form of remix and mashup. Memes and gifs, and other more elaborate media parodies, are utilized to re-engineer the content of media to "flip" the meaning of given messages. Parody and pastiche are the stylistic tropes for a just-in-time critical discourse that is post-logical, but profoundly insightful. In an historical period of apparent

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*As media educators, we engage regularly with students in our classrooms who are drawn towards critical engagement with media and participatory cult*

banalization of mainstream media, and a highly creative hive mind of participatory cultures, it behooves us as educators to distinguish between the appropriate moments for guilty pleasure and creative and critical response to the media around us, both of which can combine in the same individual or group, depending on the context and setting. As media educators, we engage regularly with students in our classrooms who are drawn towards critical engagement with media and participatory culture, either enthusiastically or with some reluctance. Whichever way they come to the table, we find students able to articulate deeply critical insights into media forms and practices once given the encouragement and some critical frames and heuristics. ❖

# Civic media as a cultural dialogue: A professional development journey of Arab and Jewish teachers via documentary filmmaking in Israel

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## Abstract

Eighteen Arab and Jewish teachers of civic education and communication studies took part in a national professional development for peace education at the Israeli Center for Educational Technology from 2016 to 2018. They created documentaries as a way to have a cultural dialogue. While learning to produce a documentary as a form of reflection, the participants deepened their dialogues and challenged their own perspectives of the Jewish-Arab conflict. Each participant represented her/his cultural heritage by producing a personal narrative that was analyzed through the media literacy critical questions. This case study provides an insight about challenges and affordances of media literacy as an approach to civic education in conflict areas such as Israel.

**Keywords:** Civic media, Intercultural communication, identity, Arab-Israeli conflict, professional development, media production

## Introduction

In the summer before the 2006 Lebanon War, Cinema, Communication, and Civics teachers of Arab and Jewish origin met for a series of seminars that aimed to break down the wall of hostility and create a dialogue about the “elephant in the room”—the Jewish-Arab conflict. We knew that we were not going to stop the war; all we wanted was to get to know each other. We worked together in the seminars but we were still full of stereotypes and negative feelings, and certain about our own righteousness. The first meeting was very emotional and promising, and then two weeks later the war broke. We thought that these events would ruin what we had just started to build in the seminars. However, all the rounds of the conflict that happened since then only strengthened the connection between us and kept us on an island of sanity in the sea of hatred. We understood that we had a tool for bridging this gap by simply meeting, talking, and getting to know each other. Inspired by that first

experience with teachers, for more than ten years we have been bringing Arab and Jewish students together to create collaborative videos. Our studies illustrated how these encounters have a short-term effect on students' empathy and their ability to acknowledge each other's narrative (Friesem, 2015; Ratner, 2015).

Other research shows that in order to have effective peace education its effect needs to be maintained through regular encounters and by helping students to stay connected (Salomon, 2006; Salomon & Crane, 2011). This experience helped us understand that teachers also need to have their own regular seminars. Year after year, Arab and Jewish teachers have been meeting and having their own students meet in order to maintain these relationships. Cinema has the power of telling stories to help us identify with characters and to affect viewers. Cinema has the power to foster empathy towards the others' narrative, because it tells personal stories that are more difficult to argue with. Creating a collaborative and yet personal video allows for a place where both Arab and Jewish stories can be told. The equality that does not exist in reality has a place in the movies.

The twenty percent Arab minority in Israel is mainly Muslim, but also contains Christians and Druze. Their cultural heritage and identity are challenged daily as they represent an Arabic speaking minority in a country with a significant Hebrew speaking Jewish majority. This case study provides an insight about challenges as well as affordances of media literacy as an approach to civic education in conflict areas such as Israel. Based on our own observations and the participants' reflection, we demonstrate how the process of learning to produce a documentary as a form of deliberation promoted deep and challenging dialogue between the Arab and Jewish teachers. Each participant represented her/his cultural heritage by producing a personal narrative.

This study examines one collaborative documentary filmmaking within the framework of the bi-national program "Dialogue through Cinema." As part of a national professional development at the Center for Educational Technology from 2016 to 2018, eighteen Arab and Jewish teachers of civic education and communication studies created documentaries as a way to have a cultural dialogue for the purpose of peace education. Furthermore, being part of a conflict

area, the teachers challenged stereotypes by reducing negative feelings and strengthening the legitimacy of each other's narrative. At the same time, the yearlong program applied the creation of personal narratives through the filmmaking process so that the teachers could experience intercultural communication while learning to use media literacy education. The structure of the professional development was based upon the process of learning contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 2008) while practicing media literacy to analyze, create, and reflect on each other's personal narratives (Hobbes, 2010; Bar On & Adwan, 2006).

### **Peace Education**

The insights from this case study showcase the extent to which peace education can be effective using practices of civic media. "Education for peace provides a rather complex tackling of collective narratives embedded in mutual historic memories, collective beliefs, the perception of personal and group identity, and high sensitivity to anything related to the conflict" (Salomon & Essawi, 2009, p. 18) These narratives are part of their society's hegemony that maintains the conflict. Peace and coexistence education hinder that hegemony by providing lenses that help recognize the legitimacy of the other as an individual (Bar-Tal, 2004). In addition, both Bar-On and Adwan (2006) and Salomon (2006) claimed that in order to reduce stereotypes, foster empathy, and eventually find the way to overcome the conflict, one must acknowledge, be sensitive to and recognize the legitimacy of the other's narrative.

Beckerman et al. (2004) studied bilingual (Hebrew and Arabic) schools in Israel and they showed a different picture. The mutual base and learning allow each side of the conflict to express their cultural voice. Beckerman et al. claimed that these schools are an island of equality and collaboration where the two groups coexist as if there were no inequality outside of the school walls. The authors emphasized the secular background and high social economical status of Arab and Jewish students. They observed how the students used cultural traditions to represent their group and how by doing that they were trying to express a civic multicultural and liberal voice in the spirit of piece education and coexistence.

Zoubi (2007) examined how being a part of a



soccer team that combines players from two different nations can create a ripple effect—positive influence that goes beyond actual participants. He found that a long-lasting mutual goal contributes to a positive change in participants' friends and family. When initiatives provide participants with long-term support, they can impact the relationship between the two rival groups thus meeting goals of peace education.

Democracy requires functioning, engaged, and literate citizens. Media literacy teachers should acquire 21st century skills in order to transfer them to their students. The findings of our study show that civic education can benefit from incorporating media production as a form of dialogue that advances social responsibility and community engagement essential for today's digital citizenship.

The purposeful and guided process of creating videos in an educational and social setting invites students to participate in meaningful emotional process as they are addressing these dilemmas (Shalita, Friedman, & Harten, 2011). The unique pedagogy of media production and film-making allows students to experience teamwork, deadlines, and adaptation of an idea into a script and then into a movie (Friesem, 2017). All of that helps students who are working together to advance towards emotional maturity. The process of producing a video includes constant reflection on opinions, positions, and cultural meanings. As part of the creative and collaborative work students explore their identities in regards to the subject of the film and to group dynamics. Students learn to solve interpersonal conflicts that are an inherent part of working as a film crew.

Producing collaborative films allows Jewish and Arab students to tell their personal narratives as well as stories of their communities and nations through symbols that include sound, movement, and other tools of cinematic emotional manipulation that a written story cannot generate. Creating a movie is an artistic subjective expression of thoughts, emotions, motivations and fears that affect and control of the senses. Levin (2011) followed Jewish-Israeli high school students who produced videos for their capstone project. He claimed that the process of producing a movie allows teenagers to identify symbolic meaning in their lives. Movies that these teenagers created became a

tool for cultural expression as well as a way to bond as a group that created a dialogue between individuals as they were trying to represent themselves and the world they lived in. Asana (2015) explored youth media in Palestine. He found that young producers use transgressive messages to challenge cultural and social boundaries of their own lives under the Israeli occupation as a form of civic media.

### **Civic Media Education**

Civic Media is defined by Henry Jenkins (2007) as “any use of any medium which fosters or enhances civic engagement” (Para 4). More recently, Ethan Zuckerman, the director of MIT center for civic media explained to PBS host, Alexander Heffner (2017) that it is a broad term that includes media created by people who hope to make social and political change. This definition adds the will to make a social and political change while Jenkins talked about civic engagement. Gordon and Mihailidis (2016) collected many case studies of civic media in their book to showcase their definition

### *Democracy requires functioning, engaged, and literate citizens.*

of civic media as “any mediated practice that enables a community to imagine themselves as being connected, not through achieving, but through striving for common good” (p. 2). In all three definitions, we can see that civic engagement, social and political change or connecting community to thrive for the common good are variations of the purpose of using media production.

We can find many examples of media literacy activities that practice civic engagement as part of producing media: a journalism inquiry, a hip hop music video, a digital campaign with a PSA to raise awareness, or simply documenting people and events that are usually not represented in the mainstream media (Hobbs, Donnelly, Friesem, & Moen, 2013; Jenkins, Shresthova, Gamber-Thompson, Kligler-Vilenchik, & Zimmerman, 2016; Tyner, 2003; Soep, 2014). The act of civic engagement has evolved with the increased use of digital devices and it is a different practice than what previous generations experienced (Levin & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017). One of the most com-

mon use of digital media to make a social change has been producing a documentary (Goodman, 2003). In most of the research on youth media, documentary is described as a way to have youth inquire, explore, and engage with an issue that is relevant to their community (Asthana, 2012). While it provides opportunities for many marginalized youth to explore their agency (Halverson, 2010), making a collaborative documentary is a pathway for dialogue between groups in conflict (Ratner, 2015). Nevertheless, rarely do we turn the focus to the educators. For that reason, we explore how Arab and Jewish teachers practice civic media while taking a professional development in media literacy as part of a national civic engagement initiative.

### **Nasser & Moti Learning to Produce a Documentary**

In one of the intercultural exchanges, Moti (pseudonym), a Jewish teacher who emigrated from Russia several years ago, talked about his trauma of living near a Mosque and hearing muezzin's calls for prayers in the early morning, disturbing his wife's sleep. When reflecting on Moti's comment, Nasser (pseudonym) a shy Arab media literacy teacher, shared that he was a muezzin himself.

empathic film teacher be an aggressive muezzin? The one who disrupted Moti's night sleep and his family's peace? It took Moti and Nasser two more meetings of collaborative exercises and hesitations until they decided to work together. Facilitators acknowledged that it is important that the goal of the mutual creation will come from participants themselves. They did not force them to choose a more difficult path. At some point one of the facilitators even suggested to both of them to produce different movies with other participants because he thought that the conflict was too painful: "It's like a victim meeting his aggressor and being asked to understand him". And yet, both Nasser and Moti decided to make a documentary together, visiting each other's home, temple, and village.

In the beginning, they considered telling the story through voice-over and decided to film the movie in Jerusalem where it all started — where Moti and his wife bought an apartment and discovered muezzin calls from four different mosques in the neighborhood. However, standing in front of the Dome of the Rock, the Islamic shrine located on the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem, they realized that *their relationship* is the story and decided to focus on the tension of their first encounter. Moti decided to visit the

mosque in Nasser's village. This visit was especially emotional, considering that Moti entered the mosque and listened to Nasser's call in the muezzin's beacon from close by. When both of them came back with the footage and screened it in class, all the other participants

were moved by the collaboration of the two teachers. Moti was sharing the experience of visiting the Arab village:

"It does not look like anything that we know. I've never ever visited Arabs and I discovered welcoming pleasant and generous people. I still cannot understand how they can shout those battle cries: 'Allā Hu 'Akbar' ('God Almighty')". For Muslims, this is part of the daily prayer—referring to God as just and greater than anything. However, for Israeli Jews, the phrase is as associated with the words that suicide terrorists say before activating their bombs.

The highlight of the collaborative documenta-

*Producing collaborative films allows Jewish and Arab students to tell their personal narratives as well as stories of their communities and nations through symbols that include sound, movement, and other tools of cinematic emotional manipulation that a written story cannot generate.*

This revelation was a defining moment as each of them was telling their story. In a shy voice Nasser explained how being a teacher was not enough to support his family and how all teachers in the Arab section had an additional job. Everybody was curious and asked questions about being a muezzin, starting from details about the profession, questions about the "muezzin law" (law that limits hours and volume of sound systems in public places). Moti was stunned and sat quietly. In his interview he reflected on how he was looking at Nasser at that moment and could not connect between early morning muezzin calls and the fellow teacher in front of him. How could a sensitive and

ry was when Nasser as a muezzin said “Allā Hu ‘Ak-bar” in the living room of the young Jewish-Russian couple. The emotional moment when Nassar calmly says the prayer in Moti’s living room increased empathy and encouraged both of them to acknowledge and celebrate each other’s cultural heritage. As we saw in Ratner’s (2015) research, making videos with personal or communal narrative enhances the connection between young film-makers and increases viewers’ empathy toward the characters’ narrative. Nasser’s prayer as a muezzin in Moti’s living room (the most private place) created a moment of empathy. “In the muezzin’s call I saw my grandfather who was a cantor in a synagogue and I still have goose bumps as I hear that voice,” said one Jewish viewer, a woman in her seventies whose grandfather was a cantor in a Jewish community outside of Israel. This moment of viewing together generated empathic reactions also among participants’ families who saw the film for the first time. These viewers’ did not know Nasser and Moti. Interestingly enough, Nasser and Moti’s movie became politically relevant. In a time when politicians are fighting over legislation that would forbid muezzins to call in the early hours of the morning, their movie was able to bring Jewish viewers a little bit closer to the issue and generate understanding and recognition of the legitimacy of each other’s narrative.

## Conclusion

The program fostered coexistence and provided practical tools for peace education between Arabs and Jews in Israel. A yearlong collaboration between two teachers who participated in the program as they produced a joint documentary, reduced hostility, adverse emotions, and stereotypes while at the same time creating a will for recognition, contact, and legitimacy of each other’s narrative (Jewish and Arab). As we re-evaluate existing paradigms for teaching and learning about the impact and potential of media for democratic processes and civic engagement, this case study showcases a successful practice for fostering a cultural dialogue. In his article, Lan (2013) suggested a framework of democratic media literacy to include deliber-

ative, pluralistic and participatory practices. The story of Nasser and Moti is an example on how civic media can reduce stereotypes, foster empathy and offer a path to overcome the conflict. Making a collaborative documentary is a participatory action that includes a deliberate approach to acknowledge and be sensitive to the other’s narrative that leads to empathy and rec-

*A yearlong collaboration between two teachers who participated in the program as they produced a joint documentary, reduced hostility, adverse emotions, and stereotypes while at the same time creating a will for recognition, contact, and legitimacy of each other’s narrative (Jewish and Arab).*

ognition of the legitimacy of each other’s narrative. The educators practiced empathy and a deliberate democratic and civic action as part of producing a documentary. This case study offers a practice where media literacy education can advance civic engagement and be a model for professional development of teachers in conflict areas. ❄

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# Is Participation in Community Media an Agent of Change?

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## Abstract

In accounts of community media, participation is often described as a mediation process that is linked with social change. However, in order to understand what the participative process is, and in what way it is relevant to concepts of participation-led media, we must first be able to identify participation comprehensively and make reliable observations and statements that produce a clear sense of what the concept and the practice of participation actually refer to. This paper considers, therefore, how participation has been accounted for from a number of different viewpoints associated with community media and its social practices, before identifying how we can move to an empirically grounded and pragmatic view of participation, as it is enacted in group life.

**Keywords: Participation, community media, media literacies, social engagement, symbolic interactionism**

**T**he question of what motivates people to contribute to community media is an idea that many are drawn to, both in the general context of civic engagement and participation, and in specific instances where people experience community media as a set of social practices and roles that are situated in identifiable community lifeworlds (Watson,

2018). These questions relate to the need to establish models of goal-driven engagement that can demonstrate the diversity and multiplicity of people's motivations as they volunteer and contribute to different community media projects in different situations and circumstances. Using an interpretivist investigation approach, founded on symbolic interactionism and ethnographically informed research techniques, I wanted to ask if it is possible to gain insight into the multiple layers of meanings and interpretations that people articulate and enact in their social and community lives? These approaches offer insight into the multiple perspectives and interpretations that people take and negotiate in their social engagements, as they undertake socially creative and applied work in different forms of community media. As an outcome of this process, I also wanted to know if it is possible to identify an empirical model of enactment that is situated in the informal and formal roles and practices of community media volunteers and activists, with resulting models that are able to demonstrate the complexity of the social processes that underpin the codification of these social roles? My contention is that people who volunteer as community media producers and activists are motivated by a range of complex, competing and multi-layered dispositions, impulses and characterisations, which cannot be easily explained or understood by any single theoretical model or framework, but must, instead, be grounded in empirical observations

that are built-up from the shared experiences represented in the accounts and the testimony of those involved in shaping and generating these practices.

In accounts of community media, participation is often described as a social process that is linked with social change. Lennie and Tacchi state that:

“A single definition of the concept of practice of participation in development is elusive. It is a malleable concept that can be used to signify ‘almost anything that involves people’ and encompasses a wide diversity of practices.”

And that

“In communication and media studies, particularly in the era of Web 2.0, participation is a key concept, and yet it is used to mean ‘everything and nothing.’”

This is particularly problematic, because in the “new communications environment” we are witnessing a “shift from vertical models of communication to horizontal models,” which implies a “shift from sending messages to providing an opportunity for people to engage in dialogue, share knowledge and ask questions” (Lennie & Tacchi, 2013, p. 10). Obviously, this means there are some challenges in how we think about and account for participation as a working concept.

In order to understand what the participative process is, and in what way it is relevant to concepts of community media, we must first be able to iden-

tify participation *comprehensibly* and make reliable *observations* and *statements* that produce a clear sense of what the concept and the practice of participation actually refer to. It will be useful to consider, there-

fore, how participation has been accounted for from a number of different viewpoints associated with community media and its social practices, before identifying how we can move to an empirically grounded and pragmatic view of participation, as it is enacted in group life. We can divide this into corresponding models, or alternative frames of reference, each linked to a representative approach that outlines the main features of each view of participation, thus helping to evaluate the relative practical application of each.

The first view to be considered can be summarised in Margaret Ledwith and Jane Springett’s *Participatory Practice—Community Based Action for Transformative Change* (Ledwith & Springett, 2010), which is associated with *counter-hegemonic approaches* to issues of social participation. The second approach is Jim Ife’s *Community Development in an Uncertain World* (Ife, 2013), which is associated with an ecological view of community development. This is followed by Porta and Mattoni’s view of civic participation (Porta & Mattoni, 2013), then by Henry Jenkins, Ford and Green’s *Spreadable Media* model (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013), which offers a technocentric approach to participation and media distribution. Finally, this is followed by a brief overview of the concept of rhizomic and arbolic forms of media as associated with Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). Many other forms of analysis are relevant: such as regulatory, policy, discourse or content analysis approaches, which would also offer noteworthy grounds for comparison if space allowed. However, the examples selected here should be sufficient to open up space for discussion from which we can consider how other, alternative or competing frames of reference, might be appraised in practice.

We can map out these alternative dispositions and modes of engagement. (See Table 1 at right)

Traditional critical media studies approaches have accounted for community, alternative and collaborative media as the *product* of a social order, imbued with distinct, though hidden power relations. The green and ecological framework reminds us of the needs of the biosphere; and the potential for community and collaborative media to fulfil a role in supporting the civic realm. Technology is seen as providing a significant underpinning to the forms of communication that we use in social interaction; which leads

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tify participation *comprehensibly* and make reliable *observations* and *statements* that produce a clear sense of what the concept and the practice of participation actually refer to. It will be useful to consider, there-

**Table 1 Participative Framework**

Social Arrangement	Forms of Participation	Main Media Forms	Aims	Ideal Community Type	Mode of Engagement
Hegemonic	Counter-Force	Oppositional	Emancipation	Discursive	Activist
Ecological	Pluralist	Diverse	Sustainability	Holistic	Steward
Civic	Representation	Public Sphere	Association	Deliberative	Representative
Techno-centric	Generative	Spreadable	Globalisation	Networked	Collaborator
Rhizomatic	Ironic	De-Territorialised	Fluidity	Nomadic	Cipher
Commercial	Customer	Sticky	Profit	Market	Consumer
Administrative	instrumental	System	Efficiency	information	Inspector
Managerial	Subordinate	Organisation	Peperuation	Hierarchical	Devotees

to potential forms and social structures that move on from the centralised and linear forms of the past. In looking at these different examples we are reminded that the ethical and political (i.e. tactical) lifeworlds that people operate in are framed in notably different ways (Henderson, 2013).

In seeking to give attention to the significance of participation as a social process in community media, then, and the way that participation is relevant to accounts of social change, we can apply Herbert Blumer's principle of *neutral social processes* (Blumer, 1990):

1. That participatory processes are neutral and are observable at the lines of entry to group life.
2. That a range of diverse alternative social developments are possible in regard to these processes at the points of entry into group life.
3. That these participative processes do not determine, nor coerce, the alternative routines and dispositions that come into play in the social setting.

The ongoing questions that we might consider, therefore, can be framed as such: is participation

in community media an agent of sustainable social change? In answering this question, it is necessary to investigate the specific social settings in which issues of community media participation, and the way that participative practices are demonstrated in group life, are apparent. This means finding out how the individual *stances* and *perspectives* relating to community media participation are established in these situations, and how they might be experienced along the lines of entry into group life. So, and in ascertaining a methodological guide for this investigation, our attention is directed to the following general issues:

- What is understood and accomplished by volunteers and participants, particularly as they seek to use and incorporate forms of participative community media practice in the routines of their group lives?
- How well-suited are the forms of community media practice and organisation to the many and varied tasks associated with participation?
- To what extent are the established models of participation, that are characteristic of community media practice, viable?
- To what extent is community media par-

ticipation disruptive of mainstream forms of media organisation?

- To what extent might community media situations be conceived as symbolic sites of inter-personal negotiation that allow for, and facilitate, expressions of identity, community and social accomplishment?

Additionally, the general methodological questions that we might seek to address are:

- In what way is it possible to observe the collaborative participatory practices that take place in community media groups?
- In what way is it possible to account for how participants in community media define and understand their role, their identity and their accomplishments?
- In what way was it possible to explain how participants reflexively understand themselves?

The conceptual underpinning this approach was an adaptation of Herbert Blumer's assertion that social processes are neutral, which thereby necessitates forms of empirical observation in specific social settings (Baugh, 1990; Blumer, 1990; Lauer & Handel, 1983). In using symbolic interactionist principles to explain the social situations being studied, it is possible to identify empirical evidence that accounts for the way that:

- Agents act reflexively in defining the situations they were encountering.
- Actors relate towards one another, and how these actions might be developed or unfold in the situation that these actors define.
- How these actors are recognised as social objects, and are defined in relation to one another.
- How any accomplished acts are originated, not from discrete motivations, but from the interaction and influence of actions that are encountered as other actors interact.
- How acknowledged social interaction

takes place at the intersection points where different actors merge their streams of action, each changing his or her own stream of action according to what others do.

- How interactions lead over time to a shared view of reality (a worldview or perspective) that becomes part of the definition and labelling of social interaction, shaping the potential for decision-making and the direction of future actions.

The systematic framework that Blumer identifies at the entry points of group life, make it possible to view participation as a neutral process. The insight gained from Blumer's approach can therefore be useful and productive in adapting and abridging concepts of participation, particularly as they can be demonstrated to be a neutral phenomenon of community media group life. As a result, it will be possible to ascertain how we can make sense of participation in group life in relation to each of these related lines of entry:

1. The structure of occupations and positions.
2. The filling of occupations, jobs and positions.
3. The new ecological arrangements.
4. The regime of work.
5. The new structures of social relations.
6. The new interests and new interest groups.
7. The monetary and contractual relations.
8. The goods produced by the manufacturing process.
9. The patterns of income of industrial personnel (Blumer, 1990, pp. 42-46).

By examining the specific settings and examples of group life, it is possible, according to Blumer, to look afresh and adapt these parameters, particularly the social conditions under which they operate and how they relate to different forms of social, technical, economic and ecological arrangements. These are arrangements that in practice, and upon examination, are distinct and different to those developed by Blumer (who discussed industrialisation), so as a result,



the overall aim for any enquiry has to be to identify a dynamic *framework of evaluation* that can encompass the practical operation of the process of participation as it is embodied in the relative relationships of form, structure and routine of group life. After considerable deliberation and adaptation of the broader methodological issues, I was able to identify this research question: Is participation in community media an agent of sustainable social change, and is it possible to identify a dynamic *framework of evaluation* that encompasses the practical operation of the process of participation as it embodies the relative relationships of form, structure and routine in group life?

This meant that by linking and validating the commonsensical practical imperatives of people who work in community media groups and networks, with the prevailing ideas and concepts that were associated with the analysis of community media, it was possible to account for the range of alternative frameworks that were at hand. Perhaps most importantly, it is possible to demonstrate that by establishing practical suggestions that help in pursuing change on the ground — both in the community media groups in practice, and in the formulation of the prevailing ideas and concepts associated with the study of community media — it is possible to direct forms of future activity and role-taking in more sustainable forms of operation. Further investigation should focus on the role definitions, functions and accomplishments of community media participants and advocates, especially if we are to develop a purposeful and pragmatic account of the challenges of civic and community development. This will entail looking at how these role definitions are defined *in situ* in different community media circumstances, and other emerging social situations. This will entail considering how we are able to account for and understand the motivations and dispositions of different actors as they engage in these activities in different situations, especially in the way that volunteers, participants and advocates *feel* about what they do. To achieve this, we must conceptualise participation as a neutral social process that encompasses a wide range of divergent and complex activities. As a result, we must look again at how concepts and practices of advocacy in the context of community media come to form a legitimate community development approach, one that is linked with sustainable community activities that need to be better understood and ap-

plied. Leadership and advocacy training, therefore, can be viewed as something that can be more purposefully developed and supported by education institutions, civic authorities and government policy makers, as leadership and advocacy training is recognised as something to be embraced and supported by community media volunteers and groups themselves. ❖

*My contention is that people who volunteer as community media producers and activists are motivated by a range of complex, competing and multi-layered dispositions, impulses and characterisations, which cannot be easily explained or understood by any single theoretical model or framework, but must, instead, be grounded in empirical observations that are built-up from the shared experiences represented in the accounts and the testimony of those involved in shaping and generating these practices.*

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# Digital competence and the future media citizen

## A preliminary conceptual analysis

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### Abstract

The meanings and demarcations lines of media literacy have been much debated, not least in relation to the paradigmatic shift from mass media to digital networks and the increased material and cultural impact of educational technology on the K-12 system. In this change process, digital competence has become a central concept. Originally launched from the policy circuits of the OECD and the EU, it is vital to the sociotechnical imaginary, 21st century skills, as well in discussions about the education of future citizens, and in 2016 digital competence was added to the Swedish K-12 curricula (lgr 11). This article is a preliminary conceptual analysis of digital competence as indicator of a hegemonic mediatized sociotechnical imaginary that connects citizenship with corporate interests and the demands of future job markets, by constructing the future ‘media citizen’ as a ‘prosumer’ designated for life and work in the platform economy.

**Keywords:** Media literacy, digital competence, mediatization, sociotechnical imaginaries, conceptual analysis, curriculum studies

### Introduction

The conceptual ecology of media literacy is complex and related to policy making, pedagogical work and research in a variety of fields (Erstad, 2010). This can be seen as part of the “knowledge problem” (Livingstone, van Couvering, 2008) in

the “incomplete project of media literacy” (McDougal, 2016), which has caused recurrent discussions about the meanings and demarcation lines of media literacy (Hobbs, Jensen, 2009; Livingstone, 2004; Potter, 2010).

Part of this discussion, concerning the historiography, the epistemology, and the pedagogical and political orientation of media literacy concerns Bildung, critical thinking and critical theory (cf. Livingstone & van Couvering, 2008; Kellner, Share, 2006). Other aspects are more related to the paradigmatic shift from mass media to digital networks, the material and cultural impact of digital educational technologies on K-12 education, and changes in media use and media practices among children and youth. In consequence, some new concepts have been suggested as alternatives to media literacy. For example, *digital literacy* (Gilster, 1997), *multiliteracy* (Cope, Kalantzis, 2000), *new literacy* (Lankshear, Knobel, 2008), *multimodality* (Kress, van Leuven, 2001), *media and information literacy* (Wilson, C., Grizzle, A. Tuazon, R. Akyempong, K. Cheung, C-K, 2011), *transliteracy* (Frau-Meigs, 2017).

*Digital competence* is a further suggestion (Pikkarainen, 2014). This is a so-called loose concept (Ilomäki, Pavola, Lakkala, Kantosalo, 2016) that denotes a variety of skills and abilities (e.g. to communicate, solve problems, and mediate information), and that can be used for different purposes and projections by different agents. Digital competence partly overlaps with media literacy and “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a variety of

forms” (Auferheide, 1993), but one important difference is that while media literacy stems from a long-term tradition of pedagogical and academic work, digital competence comes from the policy circuits of the OECD and the EU (Voogt, Pareja Roblin, 2012), and the futurology of *21st century skills*.

This makes digital competence part of a political and normative framework that reflects neoliberal beliefs and wishes (Ilomäki et al., 2016) along with a transnational ideology and an approach to education largely influenced by corporate interests (Selwyn, 2016; Williamson, 2013, 2017). One way of approaching this transnational sociotechnical imaginary (Jasanoff, 2015) and proxy signifier for “the future” (Selwyn & Facer 2013, p. 11) is through conceptual analysis (cf. Berenskoetter, 2017).

On the basis of this, I discuss digital competence as part of a mediatized sociotechnical imaginary and a neoliberal, individualistic and instrumental construction of ‘the emerging citizen’ (cf. Mihailidis, 2014) as a prosumer designated for work and play in the platform economy (van Dijck, Poell, de Waal, 2018; Mosco, 2016). The example I use is the recent addition of digital competence as keyword and directive in the Swedish K-12 curricula. Here I combine a Foucauldian approach to concepts as part of governance and biopolitics with German historian Reinhart Koselleck’s (2002, 2004) understanding of concepts, as links to experiences and expectations of time and progress. Further, my approach is influenced by Selwyn’s & Facer’s (2013, p. 6) “critical studies of educational technology” and the ambition to open “the black box of technology” (p. 11) by exposing the underlying logics in dominating narratives about technology and the future of society.

### **Mediatized sociotechnical imaginaries**

According to Jasanoff (2015a, 2015b), sociotechnical imaginaries circulate around ideas of the utility of emerging technologies and can be defined as “collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by a shared understanding of forms of social life and social order” (Jasanoff, 2015b, p. 322).

Sociotechnical imaginaries are parts of the “dreamscapes of the future”, occupying a zone between

the mental and the material, institutions and subjects, individuals and groups. They are attainable through and supportive of advances in science and technology, and give cultural form to technological changes and visions and values related to social progression and community.

Sociotechnical imaginaries combine the fertility of (new) ideas with the fixation of the present material, moral, social order. This means that there are preferred and desired futures as well as non-desired futures. Sociotechnical imaginaries that become dominating are the products of political acts that form “powerful aspirational and normative visions of preferred forms of social order” (Williamson, 2017, p. 16). This means that sociotechnical imaginaries are part of any modern society’s performative self-understanding and functional to its hegemonic order of social reproduction and progression.

Sociotechnical imaginaries are inevitable to policy, governance and corporate interests transnationally

*Some sociotechnical imaginaries are conditioned by or strongly related to media, which makes it possible to talk of mediatized sociotechnical imaginaries...*

and nationally, and are formulated and propagated by ‘agents of change’ (corporations, organizations, individuals). They appear to be systematic and rational, but are as much about collective fantasies and desires (Jasanoff, 2015a).

Some sociotechnical imaginaries are conditioned by or strongly related to media, which makes it possible to talk of *mediatized sociotechnical imaginaries* (in contrast to, say, social and technological imaginaries about a fossil-free future). By *mediatized sociotechnical imaginaries* I mean, ideas of technological and social transformation centered around changes in systems and practices of communication, interaction and mediation, and saturated by the technologies, institutions and logics of the media (cf. Couldry, Hepp, 2017; Hjarvard, 2013).

Within the realm of education, mediatization (interconnected with digitalization) may encompass the following; use of digital tools, such as platforms, networks, laptops, apps, etc. (educational technolo-

gy) in teaching, learning, administration, and communication; media-related meta-knowledge (media literacy); and mediated representations of education (media as policy arena) (Breiter, 2014). Even discourses around media literacy or such a concept as digital competence can be seen as indicators of mediatization and as central to *mediatized sociotechnical imaginaries*, influencing the socialization of future media audiences, media users and media citizens in relation to the institutions, technologies and logics of (contemporary and future) media.

### Concept analysis

Concepts are more than words since they “help us grasp the world epistemologically and give us an ontology we can relate to” (Berenskoetter, 2017, p. 154). They help us to describe and construct what we understand as reality and direct processes of change and progression, which makes them central to every academic field, profession, or process of governance and policy making.

According to Berenskoetter, there are three analytical approaches to concepts. The first approach (scientific) focuses on the genealogies and definitions of a concept. Here we can note that the use of the term competence (as in digital competence) comes from American behavioral psychology, and has been associated with the subject’s performance in non-standard situations (Pikkarainen, 2014, p. 624f) as well as being affiliated with *digital natives* and *lifelong learning* (Cartelli, 2010). Today competence in combination with digital is a policy term (Voogt, Pareja Roblin, 2012) that the OECD and the EU use in their declarations on 21st Century Skills; a term coming from P21 (*Partnership for 21st Century Learning*), a loose constellation of US-corporate interests such as Apple, Cisco, Microsoft, Dell and others with major business interests in the digitalization of education.

The second approach (political and critical) is influenced by Michel Foucault’s studies of governance and biopolitics, and how concepts become reified and tend to form the objects of which they speak (cf. Foucault 1969/2002). As we have already noted, digital competence can be seen as an example of this, not least by its addition to the Swedish K-12 curricula.

These approaches can be combined with a third approach (historic) which is strongly connected to

German historian Reinhard Koselleck and his “history of concepts” (Koselleck, 2002, 2004). According to Koselleck’s “temporal hermeneutics”, some concepts are *basic*. This means that they hold great complexity in their constitution, connect to a web of meaning and serve as crystallizations of social and political transformation, and help organize and give meaning to experiences and expectations of history and progression (Cordero, 2016). All of this makes basic concepts regulative to any discussion about the areas they denote. Thus, basic concepts are central to every sociopolitical system and connect different sociopolitical interests and major social, economic and political organizations and movements (Cordero, 2016). As examples of basic concepts, Koselleck mentions *Liberty, Democracy, Citizenship, State, Revolution*.

I am not sure that digital competence qualifies as a basic concept in every sense, but it is notable that digital refers to a major historical shift (from analogue to digital) and that competence implies a shift in knowledge culture and a desired future based on individualization and flexibility, with employability rather than employment as essence. We can also note that digital competence is used by and connects different corporate, governmental, organizational and pedagogical interests.

### The addition of digital competence to the Swedish K-12 curricula

Part of the policy work of the OECD, the EU, and the P21 has been to get digital competence into the curricula (Voogt, Preja Roblin, 2012), and in 2016 digital competence was included as a directive and keyword in the Swedish K-12 curricula (lgr 11), both in its general principles and overall goals, from pre-school to high school, as well as in several of its different subject syllabi. Beside a much-noted addition of programming as partly compulsory, the goals stated for this ‘reform’ in relation to what students are supposed to accomplish are the following:

- To be able to use and understand digital tools and media.
- To understand the effects of digitalization on society.
- To be able to approach and use digital media in a critical and responsible way.

- To be able to solve problems with the help of digital tools and turn them into action.

These additions partly overlap media literacy ambitions and have been made on the basis of inclusion and social equality. Still, to some critics this reform is too strongly connected to a system for measurement of predefined learning outcomes and “the new language of learning” (c.f. Biesta, 2010, 2006; Friesen, 2013) where terms like lifelong learning or employability and entrepreneurship are central (Selwyn, 2016; Selwyn, Facer, 2013; Williamson, 2017). This process of ‘learnification’ disconnects citizenship from Bildung and the classic liberal ideal of the autonomous human and practices of personal freedom and instead combines it with more instrumental ideas of democratic education (Biesta, 2006).

The additions that have been made in the Swedish K-12 curricula was preceded by a future vision or mediatized sociotechnical imaginary presented by the National Agency for Education, whereby all students (as well as teachers and principals) in Sweden, are supposed to have acquired what is referred to as *adequate digital competence* by the year 2022. The term adequate signals that digital competence is not to be understood in any absolute terms, but as governed by which school subject, age group, technology, etc. it is associated with. Thus, digital competence here is used as a loose concept (Ilomäki, et.al., 2016) open to different projections, while at the same time holding descriptive, regulative and connective power (Cordero, 2016, p. 63).

### **The re-constitution of the media citizen as prosumer**

All schooling is about the qualification, socialization and subjectification of the workforce, of citizens and of individuals for the future (Biesta, 2006), and any curriculum is a statement about what is considered to be the most important things to know (now and in the future) in a transfer of society’s core values between generations (Pinar, 2012). One dimension of this is the production of “good citizens” (Wan, 2014). In a mediatized society the “citizen-making enterprise” (ibid.)

unavoidably will be related to or even determined by the technologies, logics and institutions of contemporary media (Hjarvard, 2013; Krotz, 2014).

Since digital competence was included in the Swedish K-12 curricula, the idea of the media citizen (social subjects whose critical abilities, historical awareness and inclination for democratic participation) has been transformed.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence of the shift from mass media to individualized networks, ideas of the dutiful citizen and the monitorial citizen (Schudson, 1998) has been substituted with other citizen ideals and redefined using terms such as *self-actualizing citizenship* (Bennett 2008), *cultural citizenship*

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(Miller 2007), civic citizenship (Dahlgren 2009), *creative citizenship* (Hartley, 2016), DIY citizenship (Ratto & Boler 2014), *sentient citizenship* (Williamson, 2017), and even *silly citizenship* (Hartley, 2010).

To me, prosumer (Toffler, 1980) seems the most striking term, signaling as it does the blurring of production and consumption, and indicating that the ‘prosumerist’ is embedded in the infrastructures of the knowledge society, itself defined by the skills and abilities of digital competence in the blurred landscape of leisure and formal education. This leads to datafication and surveillance and to the socialization of the “next media generation” as “free labor” (Williamson, 2017) that produce, consume and share data online and thereby contribute to the platform economy of Facebook, Apple, Microsoft and the like (van Dijck et al., 2018; Mosco, 2016).

### **Conclusion and discussion**

The dreamscapes of “21st Century Skills” and a “mediatized educational sociotechnical imaginary” are activated by the concept digital competence, which is also connected to the “algorithmic imaginaries” (William-

son, 2017) and the “platform economy” (van Dijck et al., 2018). This affects the future qualification, socialization and subjectification of the students as workforce, citizens, and individuals (Biesta, 2006).

Digital competence partly counters core values of the media literacy tradition and belongs to a mediatized sociotechnical imaginary that is marked by ‘chronological imperialism’ and a futurology that instead of opening up the future for young people seems to subject them to an educational system penetrated by corporate interests and neoliberal governance, which threatens their possibilities for personal and social liberation (Facer, 2012, p. 98).

This presents a challenge to the long-term values of public education as well as to the media literacy tradition. One way of meeting this is to direct more attention to the political economy and the representational and rhetorical order of educational technologies and other media that are used *inside* the realm of K-12 education. By acknowledging the intensified mediatization of education, and mediatized educational sociotechnical imaginary, the media literacy tradition can reopen imaginaries of *Bildung* and critical theory and challenge the Ed-tech industry, policy makers and others attempts to redefine the values and temporalities of public education with concepts like *digital competence*. ❖

#### FOOTNOTE

<sup>1</sup> The concept media citizen emanates from the research project *Media citizenship and the mediatization of school* where Michael Forsman & Staffan Ericson, both at Södertörn University, Stockholm, study the impact of media on the school’s training of “media citizens” in a historical study of curricula, teaching materials and teacher education. The project is financed by The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Science (2016–2018).

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# Media and Information Literacy: Growth Through Collaborative Pedagogy<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The fields of media literacy and information literacy have different histories and have developed through different traditions. Despite these differences, many writers including Sonia Livingstone, Renee Hobbs and Marcus Leaning, support their integration. This appeal also forms the foundation for the various projects and curricula established by the Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy (a UNESCO initiative). Notwithstanding these appeals and ventures, the two fields remain largely siloed in U.S. higher education.

This research examines the separate traditions of media literacy and information literacy in the U.S., delineates the striking commonalities between the two fields (while also recognizing important pedagogical and philosophical differences within and between both), and provides a rationale for why the two should

be taught together. The authors offer one approach for teaching media and information literacy in a liberal arts college classroom, include a discussion of the authors’ faculty-librarian collaboration, an overview of the course, and student responses to it. They conclude with explanations for the dearth of similar models and the reasons for the lack of alliances between the two fields of study in general, including the persistence of silos in higher education and outdated, sometimes stereotypical notions of information literacy (from some traditional communications studies perspectives).

**Keywords:** Collaboration, information literacy, librarians, higher education



**N**ot much has changed in the decade or so since Sonia Livingstone characterized definitions of media literacy as “hotly contested”. And in a global context, media literacy has of course numerous definitions, histories, agendas and trajectories. However even within the United States, media literacy is understood and practiced in widely divergent ways, ranging from purely skills based approaches to critical cultural perspectives. The terrain is further complicated by the more recent introduction of terms such as transliteracy and multiliteracy in attempts to provide overarching or comprehensive concepts that transcend disciplinary differences. Doug Belshaw suggested that such umbrella terms are futile, and observed that, “people tend to assume that their favored term includes every other term” (Panke, 2015).

A similar debate concerning definitions has also caused some difficulty in the information literacy area. For so long librarians were, and some still are, teaching information literacy as a set of skills that one must attain in order to be information literate (Tewell, 2015). Eamon Tewell (2015) wrote the following about the landscape and history of information literacy from the perspective of librarianship:

Since first entering the professional discourse in the 1970s, the concept of information literacy (IL) has created a massive amount of discussion regarding its definition and implications for learners and librarians in an ever changing information environment (p. 25).

Similar to media literacy, IL has also had a tradition of being difficult to define. In the U.S., IL has commonly been thought of as a skills-based pedagogy that has largely forced learners to conform to the structure of the library and its research tools. One example of this skills-based approach is the CRAAP (Currency, Relevancy, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose) test, which was developed by Blakeslee (2003). CRAAP asks essential questions when evaluating information, but this list can also be overwhelming as well as subjective (i.e., what does authority mean?). The adoption of the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (2016) led to the development of six frames of information literacy that were more flexible in their

application: Authority Is Constructed and Contextual, Information Creation as a Process, Information Has Value, Research as Inquiry, Scholarship as Conversation and Searching as Strategic Exploration. These core ideas would better address the changes in the higher education landscape, in addition to a changing information ecosystem (ACRL, 2016). This is quite different from the earlier standards described above, which defines IL as a prescriptive, skills-based model.

Tewell (2015) notes that between 2005 and 2006, the application of an inquiry-based, or critical pedagogy approach, entered the LIS field. This marked a change in the way librarians and LIS faculty looked at information literacy instruction. Finally, accessing information and media is equally relevant to both areas, however, the more recent inclusion of creation and/or production elements, widely emphasized in media literacy, is a component that information literacy has been slower to adopt.

Collaboration has long been touted as an important educational praxis for students to experience at colleges and universities, even if only through basic classroom activities such as group projects. Over the past several decades, various iterations of collaborative co-teaching have been held in high regard for the intellectual growth of faculty. Furthermore, it is assumed that this process will have a positive impact on students who directly observe collaborative models in the classroom. However, there are surprisingly few examples that extend beyond theoretical rationales and offer practical media and information literacy classroom models, especially in tertiary education where disciplinary silos still dominate. In spite of this, we endorse Marcus Leaning’s (2009) call for a media and information literacy alliance. He (2009) noted, “. . . the experience of being a user of information resources and a consumer of media is so similar that the two cannot be separated”. Prior to this and more than a decade ago, Livingstone (2005) called for a “convergent notion of literacy”, one that would combine the traditions of information literacy and media literacy (p. 10). Many others have made similar appeals including Hobbs (2010) and UNESCO’s Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers (2011).

So why bring media literacy (ML) and information literacy (IL) together? In the contemporary digital landscape, media and information are simply

indistinguishable from one another. Moreover, despite different histories and trajectories, media literacy and information literacy have additional commonalities including shared language and areas of interest. IL and ML also share concerns (including ideology, representation), influences (Gramsci, Stuart Hall, Freire, hooks, Giroux), and approaches from critical theory, critical pedagogy and feminist theory. It is important to note MIL is not about incorporating ML to enhance IL or vice versa. We propose an equitable collaboration that borrows from two fields to enhance both. It is less about subsuming one field under the other and more about the strengths and depths possible through an alliance. For each of us, understanding the others' field has opened up additional research, resources and perhaps more importantly, fresh theoretical perspectives

*For each of us, understanding the others' field has opened up additional research, resources and perhaps more importantly, fresh theoretical perspectives on the role of media/information in our culture. IL and ML are two sides of the same coin.*

tives on the role of media/information in our culture. IL and ML are two sides of the same coin. Failure to see the ways in which they connect and can help inform one another, is to borrow Leaning's (2014) provocative phrase, "pedagogically wasteful".

In spring 2016, we developed and piloted a media and information literacy course with the following features:

- 3 credit hour, face-to-face course, 80 minutes, twice a week
- Aimed at second year undergraduates
- Housed in English & communications department, small midwestern liberal arts college
- Required for communications majors & minors, professional writing majors and minors, secondary English education majors
- Elective for marketing communication minors
- 33 students enrolled (over double aver-

age class size)

- Subsequently moved from spring to fall to coincide with media literacy week
- Since fall 2017, counts as general education credit

The class covers a wide range of topics including propaganda, participatory culture, media ownership, reality television, issues of representation, advertising/native advertising, privacy, surveillance, data mining, filter bubbles, piracy, copyright, fair use, open access, remix, authorship & Wikipedia and the uses of social media.

In developing and implementing our course, the inevitable question emerged - how do we know what we are doing in the classroom has any effect? In an effort to answer this question, we attempted to assess and quantify competency levels in regards to student learning through the use of a survey. Admittedly, this was driven in part by the desire to "prove" the worth of information and media literacy, as well as our own value, in an assessment obsessed educational culture. Moreover, the significance attributed to quantitative 'evidence',

both at our home institution, as well as the academy in general, further prompted this approach, despite our own frustrations with the inadequacies of survey instruments and quantitative approaches in general.

A survey was distributed in conjunction with the course. Student participation was anonymous and voluntary, but strongly encouraged. In order to analyze changes from the beginning of the term to the end, a series of ten questions posed to the students in the pre and posttest were used to construct a media and information literacy index.<sup>2</sup> The questions focused on the purpose and influence of media and information consumption, its creation and ownership. Student responses were scored and then compiled into an additive index which was scaled to a 100 point scale. An analysis of the results from the pre-survey indicated that students understood, albeit somewhat simplistically, that media and information influences them. In the post-survey, students understood the need to dig deeper into sources and bias. The statistical data was considerably less illuminating and valuable than the qualitative data obtained from both the open-ended

survey questions and the final course reflection paper. And although the survey was an important assessment tool in the initial pilot project, it is apparent that the addition of qualitative methodologies provides deeper insights into our ongoing study. We plan to continue the survey, but realize the inherent problems (modifying questions to get the kinds of answers that reflect favorably on the course, and addressing accusations of ‘navel gazing’ by using our own students to ‘prove’ the worth of our efforts). A survey is unlikely to elicit qualitative, reflective, student authored perspectives on the class.

In contrast to the survey, the Twitter takeaways, alongside the course reflection papers guided future iterations of the course, as well as providing more valuable insights into student learning. Incidentally, the class hashtag (#co233bc), is curated year round by both of us (and even students no longer in the class). Constant curation allows for up-to-date material to be continuously added to the account, supporting future assignments and providing additional resources for the next group of students taking the class.

Given the many commonalities between media and information literacy, why are there so few alliances between the two areas? In this last section, we will briefly outline four barriers to implementation.

The definitional discrepancies referenced at the beginning of this paper help account for the reluctance to combine or even envision the possible crossovers between media literacy and information literacy. Many media literacy advocates view information literacy as a one-dimensional, skills-based, prescriptive enterprise and either lack awareness or fail to recognize developments in the LIS field over the past twenty years. Some U.S. media literacy models foreground a skills-only approach whereas some information literacy proponents are fundamentally concerned with critical questions of knowledge, power and meaning. This discrepancy was evident during the fall 2016 inaugural North American chapter meeting of the UNESCO based Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy (GAPMIL). The meeting was dominated by media literacy educators (only one librarian attended) and there was palpable resistance to the combination of media and information literacy as advocated by UN-

ESCO. GAPMIL work continued in Chicago in 2017 and more recently, in Lisbon in spring 2018. Both included greater representation from the information literacy field.

A second barrier to implementing media and information literacy has to do with practical constraints, including time and money. Silos between media literacy and information literacy exist in part because as noted earlier, the academy, writ large, is traditionally focused on its own, separate disciplines. It remains a significant challenge to reduce any silo in this environment although collaborative co-teaching is one way to disrupt this reality. However co-teaching, particularly across disciplines, takes immense time and resources. We created a true interdisciplinary model of collaboration, but it was not easily implemented. Depending on teaching styles and personalities, including willingness to give up space and power in the class, co-teaching can take some getting used to.

The lack of models is a third barrier to implementation. Although there have been repeated calls by high profile experts in the field to combine media and information literacy, there are very few practical examples of what this might look like in the classroom. With this in mind, we looked to the open access UNESCO curriculum (2011) for a foundation in bringing media and information literacy together.

*Collaboration has long been touted as an important educational praxis for students to experience at colleges and universities, even if only through basic classroom activities such as group projects.*

And although media literacy and information literacy have increased visibility, particularly in a post-2016 election culture obsessed with ‘fake news’, the UNESCO model is little known and underutilized, at least within the U.S.

One additional example (and the only one we found that is remotely similar) is a media and information literacy course offered at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.<sup>3</sup> While this course hints at collaborative and critical approaches, it is very different from our own class as it is taught online by three educators—a librarian, one faculty member in film

and one in journalism. Each week, they take turns to teach media literacy and information literacy concepts from the perspective of their own disciplines.

The final barrier to implementation is student resistance to the idea that knowledge is not neutral. This is a radical concept as many of our students commonly see learning as a linear process. They are used to a system where information passed from teacher to student is the most credible and authoritative. When posed with ideas and questions about the peer review process, for example, that push back on these traditionally held notions, they sometimes struggle to understand that bias and power occur at even the upper echelons of the academy. Our students are typically, and understandably indoctrinated by neoliberal traditions of education that dictate 'correct' ways

along with alternative means of discussing research in non-traditional arenas including blogs and on social media.

In conclusion, media literacy and information literacy researchers and practitioners continue to miss out on opportunities for collaboration, valuable partnerships and a potentially powerful alliance. The two areas have common goals and are also often both committed to working open in order to share resources. We hope that media literacy advocates recognize that a coalition with those working in the LIS field is key in order for media and information literacy in the United States to make a more forceful impact, especially in tertiary education.

Despite several barriers to implementation of media and information literacy curricula, there is reason for optimism. First and foremost, based on our research, it is clear that undergraduate students respond positively to a collaborative media and information literacy pedagogy that challenges and complicates protectionist versus empowerment media and information literacy traditions. Second, the 2016 formation of the North American Sub-Chapter of the UNESCO-initiated GAPMIL network suggests that there is a willingness to bring the two fields together. Further evidence of this was evident at the University of Rhode Island's Winter Symposium on Digital Literacy in Higher Education held in January 2017, which included the ACRL Framework to help guide discussions among librarians, LIS faculty, and those in the fields of communications, education and beyond. Subsequent GAPMIL meetings in Chicago (2017) and Lisbon (2018) also included greater representation from the LIS field. Additionally in summer 2019, both the American Library Association and the National Association for Media Literacy Education will host conferences at the same time in Washington, D.C. And finally, we anticipate seeing a plethora of media and information literacy courses in response to the moral panics concerning so-called 'fake news', but whether these will be prescriptive, skills based courses or something more integrative and substantive remains to be seen. ✱

*Many media literacy advocates view information literacy as a one-dimensional, skills-based, prescriptive enterprise and either lack awareness or fail to recognize developments in the LIS field over the past twenty years.*

of being a student such as deference to authority, as well as equally hegemonic notions of how professors 'should' teach (i.e. depositors of knowledge).

Even as liberal arts focused institutions insist they want students to 'think critically', critical media and information literacy is ironically, perceived by some as a dangerous concept that 'goes too far'. Regrettably, there are many educators who define authority in simplistic ways by upholding the authority of 'x' journal or 'x' database, as well as their own traditional, perceived position of infallibility in the classroom. Journal articles from a database are frequently considered the most authoritative sources and students are required to use them. Of course, the construction of credibility and authority is not so simple. There is very little or no consideration of open educational resources or discussion regarding what research gets left out of some mainstream journals or the financial and ideological power publishers have on the academic publishing industry. Some administrators, educators and institutions are slow to realize that academic publishing is evolving,

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Excerpts are reprinted with permission from Media and Information Literacy in a Higher Education Environment: An Overview and Case Study. In J. Cabbage (Ed.), *Media Literacy in Higher Education Environments* (pp. 60-77), Hershey, PA: IGI Global (2018), & Media and Information Literacy: A Case for Combined Critical Pedagogy. In A. Pashia & J. Critten (Eds.), *Credit-Bearing Information Literacy Courses*. Chicago, IL: Association of College & Research Libraries (forthcoming, 2018).

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# Protecting or Empowering: News Literacy Education in the Midst of the Post-Truth Debate

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## Abstract

At first, research concerning young's relationship with the media was more focused on the dangers and distresses, than on the benefits that technology would offer to young people. However, after a while, an important shift occurred in the way how some researchers were framing their studies, focusing more on the opportunities posed by the use of the Internet by young people.

In the light of the debate about the influence of (what some label as) fake news, particularly during the Brexit referendum and the presidential 2016 U.S. election trail, the discussion between risks and opportunities in media education is again pertinent. Some authors have sustained media literacy importance as a tool to react against the misinformation spread (Leetaru, 2016; McGivney, Kasten, Haugh, & DeVito, 2017), while others have been cautioning against a possible backlash effect (boyd, 2017; Craft, Ashley, & Maksl, 2017; Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017).

Following Mihailidis and Viotty's (2017) suggestion for the need to reposition news literacy in the post-truth debate, this essay looks into the literature and proposes that news literacy education should be providing means of protection while also providing means of empowerment. Additionally, this essay concludes that scholars and educators should consider positioning news literacy education in relation with human rights, humanism and global education.

**Keywords:** News media literacy, media education, human rights, risks and opportunities

There was a time when research concerning young's relationship with the media was more technophobe. Scholars were more focused on the dangers and distresses than on the benefits that the technology would offer to young people. Accordingly, media literacy interventions were, then, designed to protect individuals from the harmful effects of the media. In particular, in the 1980's, education about the media was mostly designed to protect youngsters from negative content of television (Gutiérrez & Tyner, 2012: 441). Then, with the generalization of the Internet use, research about young people and the media, at first, often focused more on concerns about cyberbullying, sexual predators, and so on.

When media literacy is positioned under a protectionist perspective, it is assumed that people need protection from something that is harmful and more powerful than them. In a time that individuals would only act as an audience, what they could do to change the agenda was somehow more limited. So, in a way, it is understandable that many media educative interventions had that protectionist tone. However, as the media landscape changed to give more participatory initiative to the audience, new opportunities arose.

Around 2006 and 2008 there was an important shift in how some researchers started to frame their studies about young people and the media. Around that time, new studies come up exacerbating the virtues of the media use among young people (Bennett, 2008; Ito, 2010; Watkins, 2009). Likewise, when the scholarly debate started to evolve from a panicking view to a more positive one, media literacy interventions started to assume a more empowering tone instead of just a protectionist one. This was a little before the Arab Spring which started in Tunisia, 2010, and that also brought a new light of hope to the positive potential of technology use. Some might argue that, in some cases, this shift in the perspective about technology went a little too far, incorporating a utopian or 'technoforia' view. However, these studies made an important contribute recognizing that youth is not a homogeneous mass (Bennett, 2008; boyd, 2014) and that the uses which young people do of the Internet can be very diverse (Ito, 2010; Watkins, 2009).

Technology is part of young people's lives. They spend a big portion of their time connected to it (Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014), like adults also do. What authors like Ito, Watkins or Bennett have in common is their understanding of how being connected all the time may not necessarily be a bad thing in itself. In the end, it all comes down to the uses that individuals are making, or not making, of the Internet. And that is where media education can play an important role in broadening the views that young people have about the media, empowering them and possibly bridging down the gaps in between. So, the affordances and constraints of media use may differ among young people. While media exposure and participation may increase the risks, media education could pass along certain competences that would protect and empower young people from such risks.

This was also, more or less about the same time, when the term news literacy started to be more widely used in the scholarly research. Although the idea of news literacy was not new, the generalized use of the term was. Much of what has been written about the debate between protecting and empowering perspectives in media education in general could be extended to the realm of news literacy, in particular; yet, with some nuances.

In fact, the concept of news literacy in itself already incorporates an empowering view. News literacy is often defined as the set of competences which allow people to better assess, evaluate and produce the news and which empowers citizens' participation in a democratic society. Malik, Cortesi and Gasser (2013), for example, state that there are five elements in a news literacy definition, those being: knowledge about the role of news, about the motivation to seek out news, about where to access news, about how to evaluate news, and about how to create news (Malik et al., 2013). This last element, about news production, is deeply related with the notion of a participatory audience who can be empowered with a voice. In fact, the authors are very clear about this empowering dimension of news literacy: "What, then, do we want to achieve with 'news literacy'? We want to achieve empowered citizens" (Malik et al., 2013: 8).

While acknowledging how news literacy is built under the umbrella construct of media literacy and in relation to other boroughs like civic education and journalism, Mihailidis (2012) also stresses this empowering dimension of news literacy in a global level: "News literacy acknowledges that in changing news environments, students of all ages need to learn about news not only through established practices and venues, but also as content pertains to new modes of voice, expression and perspective on a global scale" (Paul Mihailidis, 2012: 1).

In the field of media education, scholars have been debating the weight that protectionism versus empowering perspectives should play for quite some time now. Some researchers argue that the move from protecting to empowering approaches raises some questions. For example, in 2009, Buckingham was cautioning about that move, especially in the political discourse.

"In a deregulated, market-driven economy, the argument goes, people need to be responsible for their own behaviour as consumers. Rather than looking to the government to protect them from the negative aspects of market forces, they need to learn to protect themselves. (...) It reflects a shift from public regulation to individual self-regulation that we can see in many other areas of modern social policy.

Of course, this comes packaged as a democratic move—a move away from protectionism and towards empowerment. But it is also an individualising move: it seems to be based on a view of media literacy as a personal attribute, rather than as a social practice. Indeed, it could be seen to place a burden on individuals that they might not necessarily be disposed or able to cope with

And while it gives people responsibilities, it does not also extend their rights: it positions them as consumers rather than as citizens” (Buckingham, 2009: 16-17)

Another interesting point brought by Buckingham to the debate is this view about the relationship between responsibilities and rights; consumers and citizens; as well as empowerment and protection.

About the same time, while assessing young Europeans’ uses of the Internet, Livingston and Haddon advocated a more balanced approach to media education, one where “risks and opportunities must be addressed together” (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009: 25).

However, two year later, in 2011, Hobbs was pointing out that media literacy is also not only about protectionism:

“Those who position media literacy education simply as an antidote to mass media exposure may be blinded inadvertently to the wider range of aims of media literacy education, thus missing out on important evidence and information that contributes to the development of digital and media literacy both in the United States and around the world.” (Hobbs, 2011: 421)

If the debate about protectionist and empowering approaches to media education is not new, why talk about it again? Today, in the light of the discussion about the influence of (what is commonly labeled as) fake news in political campaigns, particularly during the Brexit referendum in the UK and the presidential 2016 U.S. election trail, the idea of media and news literacy as an antidote arose again. Some authors have sustained that several domains of media literacy could act as an important tool to react against the misin-

formation spread (Leetaru, 2016; McGivney, Kasten, Haugh, & DeVito, 2017), while others have been cautioning against a possible backlash where doubt has become a tool (boyd, 2017, 2018) and urging for the need to repositioning media and news literacy in this “era of partisanship and distrust” (Craft, Ashley, & Maksl, 2017; Paul Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017: 441).

Thus, if we do not want media education to have the opposite effect of the intended one, raising cynicism (P. Mihailidis, 2008), for example; then, it is important to reflect, once again, about the borders between protectionism and empowering tones, specifically, in news media education.

I would argue that people cannot really become empowered if they do not understand how information is produced and how information is assimilated. Let’s imagine a scenery of war, for instances, one where opponents are moving their armies forward. They usually proceed to attack, while also looking back and thinking about their own defenses. Now, let’s take the sexual education example. Usually, educators provide some sort of knowledge about biology, STD’s, pregnancies, birth control and condom use. Or they may even advocate for total abstinence. In any case, educators offer a protecting advice in order to empower young people about their own choices and behaviors.

In media education, we do not want to scare young people about the media in a way that they build up cynicism and news avoidance, but we also should not be naives to advocate only for an empowering approach. How can people really become empowered about their media experience, if they do not have the critical thinking which allows them to also protect themselves from being manipulated, for example?

This equilibrium between protecting and empowering approaches is particularly relevant in a time when young people act not only as news consumers, but also as sharers and producers, while belonging to a larger society, where, hopefully, one day, they will act as citizens. Jenkins suggests that we need control at an individual level to have power at a collective level (Andersen, 2017). Livingston et al. (2009) also advocated that balance between risks and opportunities.

Hence, in this essay—following Mihailidis and Viotty’s (2017) suggestion for the need to reposition news literacy—I would argue that, in the future, news literacy should be designed with such equilibrium that



it provides both means of protection and means of empowerment. Accordingly, I would suggest that this dichotomy view, expressed so far, should be replaced by a more holistic approach in which protection and empowerment come together in a *continuum* where they may, and should, coexist simultaneously. Thus, a first conclusion of this essay is that **media education needs the right equilibrium between protectionist and empowering approaches.**

But there are other aspects to consider while applying that holistic approach. Although, generally speaking, I would advocate for equilibrium between protectionism and empowering tones in news media literacy interventions, I would also add that interventions should be designed with the context of the participants in consideration. Young people are not a homogeneous mass (Bennett, 2008; boyd, 2014) and their starting point should be taken into consideration when scaling the weight given to each dimension in an intervention. Different young people may need different levels of protection/empowerment. Also, the same perspective of media education may have a different impact according to young people's prior experience and competences about the media. Hence, it may be useful for a media educator to do a preliminary assessment of the participants and adapt the program to their needs.

Building up on boyd's (2017) suggestion for "humanity" and on Mihailidis and Viotty (2017) call for a "caring" dimension in media literacy, my second conclusion would be that **news literacy education should be presented in connectedness with an ethical dimension, where humanism, human rights and global education are incorporated too.** The weight given to protecting or empowering perspectives in news literacy education should always take into consideration that fundamental ethical dimension. After all, the final goal—of educating about how to access, evaluate and produce news—should be to create better citizens and a more harmonized society. ✨

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# Understanding the Geopolitics of News: Towards a Model of International News Literacy

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## Abstract

International news, with its own characteristics and dynamics, are loaded with a strong power of representation and are for the majority of the people the first way to get an idea of the world. Their international projection often implies considerations related to media geopolitics or traditional forms of propaganda. News and media literacy limited interest on international news requires thinking about the design of a model to critically approach news on international issues. The results obtained through an online survey with an adult Spanish-speaking population suggest the existence of different levels of critical approach to news on international issues, ranging from passive consumption to the exercise of an informed and active citizenship of the world.

**Keywords:** International news, news literacy, media literacy, world politics, geopolitics.

## Introduction

It is common as university professor in the fields of International relations, Contemporary History and Political Science, to ask students to use news media sources in classroom discussions on current international events. The general impression from my decade-long personal experience in teaching at universities both in Spain and in Latin America is students' general lack of critical approach toward media, and specifically on international news. Students use

to bring to class articles from blogs, CNN, national newspapers or Russia Today, without questioning who is producing the news and which are the possible political and geopolitical considerations behind the selected pieces of news. This appears as particularly relevant because, as consequence of the flow of information in the current digital society and the emergence of social networks platforms, students, and people in general, have potential access, or passive exposure, to news about international issues from anywhere in the world (Clausen, 2002; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010). Concerning news in Spanish for example, people could come across news produced in every Latin American country, Spain, the US, and even in countries like Russia or China. However, the opportunity offered by the most recent technological advances to potentially access a wide range of news sources, comes with a price. In the current global media ecosystem it looks more difficult to know the national, cultural or political context where the news was produced.

International news are for many the first way to have an idea of the world or about far places, at the same time carrying a strong power of representation of the Other (De Botton, 2014; Galtung & Hobe, 1965; Robertson, 2015; Segev, 2016). The lack of a critical approach toward international news could lead to the construction of a distorted vision of the reality, increasing stereotypes and forms of ethnocentrism (Said, 1981), finally developing a flawed vision of the actual world, and hindering people

possibility to correctly participate in the world community. The character of the current digital society gave people more power and advanced technological tools as news consumer (Gillmor, 2010; Mihailidis, 2012), but this power supposes too increasing responsibility for individuals as members of the world community. For all these reasons, and considering the media and news literacy limited interest in specifically approach international news, it is necessary to question which skills people need to develop in order to critically approach news on international issues, with the objective to achieve a wider perspective of the world we live, and become informed and active citizens of the world.

### **Geopolitics of news, active citizenship and news literacy**

The analysis of the relation between the character of international news and the discipline of news and media literacy, could offer some interesting points for the discussion. International news have their own characteristics and dynamics, generally resumed with the predominance of countries with the highest economic and military power, issues of geographic and cultural proximity, or unpredictable events (Galtung & Robe, 1965; Robertson, 2015; Segev, 2016; Van Dijk, 1987). Their selection already supposes a vision of the world proposed to the people, which is related to the political economy of the media and their ideological, commercial or national interests (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; McChesney, 2008). International news structural and intrinsic character already excludes a wider and more complete representation of the world, which needs to be related with the interests of the media producing and distributing these kind of news.

The lack of equilibrium in the flow of international news has been often related with issues of domination in terms of representation of the Other and hegemony (UNESCO, 1980). This debate and the current evolution of the global news media ecosystem, with the raise of alternative and so-called counter-hegemonic news channels, already put international news in the realm of geopolitics and international relations (Clausen, 2002; Painter, 2008; Xie & Boy-Barrett, 2015), and with the power to potentially influence governments' foreign policy decisions (Gilboa, 2005; Seib, 2009). This appears

as particularly relevant if related to traditional news and media literacy approaches to general news, often focusing on the search for reliable information or trusted sources. Instead, in the case of international news, it is necessary to consider too that information could have its origins from different media systems, with different professional values (Hallin & Mancini, 2012; Waisbord, 2013).

While traditional news literacy models focus more on the teaching of journalistic practice and in exporting journalistic epistemology (Craft, 2016; Hobbs, 2010), other models take into consideration also a deeper knowledge of the political and economic context in which the news is produced (Ashley, 2016). The understanding of the differences between national contexts, which could open up deeper questions about the possibility of understanding between cultures, the values of citizen cosmopolitanism and the representation of the Other (Reese, 2012), seems essential in order to achieve what can be defined as international news literacy.

### **Method**

This research main goal is to formulate a first approach to the design of a possible model of critical approach to international news for an adult population. The quantitative approach with an exploratory scope of the research was characterized by an in depth online survey with an adult Spanish-speaking population. The survey included the analysis of a news article, published in the Russian state-media Sputnik News in Spanish, on the case of the alleged chemical attack in Kheir Sheikoun in Syria, on April 4, 2017. The article was chosen out of consideration that Sputnik News is a state-media belonging to a country directly involved in the war, and the piece is based on the analysis of an Iranian political expert, which is another country directly involved in the Syrian conflict. The fact that at the time of the survey there wasn't yet any advance in the official investigation on the alleged chemical attack, recommended to be at least be generally skeptic and cautious about the article and its content, which in this case presented a categorical denial of the existence of any attack.

A multiple correspondence analysis was carried out in order to find those factors useful for a critical approach toward international news. The technique of

cluster analysis was then used in order to define different groups of people, finally representing the different levels of people critical approach to international news. This method aims on one side to identify the necessary factors in order to have a critical approach to international news within the framework of media and news literacy, and, on the other side, it is useful in order to describe people different levels of approach to international information.

### Sample

The sample for this study was made of 56 people, aged from 19 to 59 years old. It is relevant to highlight that 36% of the population had a university master degree level, while only 2% having a primary school level, and 9% a secondary or high school level. That means, 89% of the respondents presented a basic university level. English is spoken by 88% of the respondents, in addition to their mother tongue. The sample is mainly composed of highly educated people who know at least another language. These conditions suggest that, at least theoretically, the great majority of the respondents hold basic personal skills in order to search for more information, and for being potential active users and news consumers.

### Results

The frequencies analysis reveals that the majority of the respondents managed to recognize at least one of the features or dynamics which characterizes international news (59%). Respect to the four mentioned news media analyzed in the survey (BBC, TeleSUR, El País and CNN in Spanish), an average of 67% of the respondents was not able to identify the ownership or the political leaning of any of them. Such lack of knowledge could hinder the possibility for people to better recognize not so evident media bias or political and economic interests.

Respect to the alleged chemical attack in Syria, 54% of the respondents said they have been following the events in the news, while 80% of the respon-

dents did not know that Sputnik News was a Russian state-media. Almost half of the respondents considered the article a good source of information (48%). The majority of respondents answered sharply and in a categorical way (67%) by assuming one specific version of the event, beside the fact that at the time of the survey there were still no certain data on the alleged chemical attack and no journalists or international organizations managed to reach the place where the event occurred. The fact that the percentage of those who answered in a categorical way is higher than those who followed the news of the chemical attack (54%) confirms the relevance of personal biases in an adult population.

Through the multiple correspondence analysis it was possible to find three specific dimensions, which has been called: Geopolitics of International News, Digital Actions, and Active Skepticism.

The first dimension reunites issues concerning media political economy, their political and econom-

Table 1: Multiple Correspondence Analysis

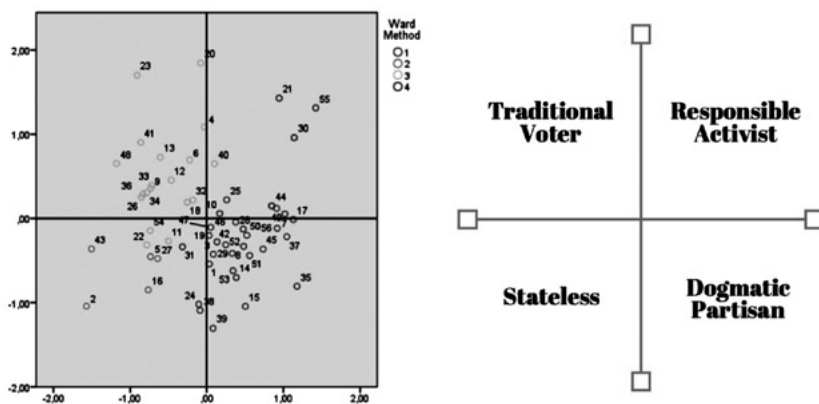
Dimension	Resume of the model			
	Cronbach's Alpha	Variance extracted for		
		Total	Inertia	% of variance
1 Geopolitics of International News	,821	4,391	,258	25,831
2 Digital Actions	,781	3,771	,222	22,182
3 Active Skepticism	,774	3,684	,217	21,673
Total		11,847	,697	
Media	,793 <sup>a</sup>	3,949	,232	23,229

ic interests, and the characteristics and dynamics of international news. The Digital Actions dimension mainly includes people digital skills and their online behavior, while the Active Skepticism dimension focuses on the need to be an active user and validate the information consumed.

Cluster analysis permitted to identify four groups of people who can be divided into more or less advanced groups in terms of critical approach toward information on international issues. According to their general characteristics, the groups has been named through concepts taken from the semantics of citizenship in relation to their civic responsibilities:

Table 2: Content of the dimensions

DIMENSIONS	VARIABLES
1 Geopolitics of International News	Media ownership
	Knowledge of Sputnik News
	Following the news on the possible chemical attack in Syria
	Identifies characters and dynamics of international news
	Interpretation of the possible chemical attack in Syria
	Identifies possible bias
2 Digital Actions	Only read the headlines of a news
	Intentionally searching for information about an event when is not an headline anymore
	Trust in news
	Discussing on social media news about international issues
	Sharing on social media news about international issues
	“Like” news about international issues
	Discussing the issue in person or on social media
	Ideological stance
Algorithm role	
3 Active Skepticism	Researching in order to validate an inforamtion
	Delve into an issue with other articles on the same topic



Graph 1: Cluster Analysis. Digital Actions (vertical) and Geopolitics of Information (Horizontal)

- Group 4: Responsible Activist
- Group 1: Dogmatic Partisan
- Group 3: Traditional Voter
- Group 2: Stateless

The Responsible Activist group is the one who best meets the ideal characteristics for a critical approach to information on international issues. They are generally skeptical of the information, and they present a cautious attitude towards ongoing events about which it is still not possible to have certain data. They have a basic knowledge of the characteristics of international news, ownership of the media and their ideological position. Beside that, they are interested in what is happening in the world and do-

Table 3: Characteristics of the groups

DIMENSION	VARIABLES	CLUSTERS			
		1 Dogmatically Partisan	2 Stateless	3 Traditional Voter	4 Responsible Activist
1. Geopolitics of International News	Media ownership	No able to identify media ownership	No able to identify media ownership	No able to identify media ownership	Identifies ¾: Identifies all media ownership
	Knowledge of Sputnik News	No	No	No	Yes
	Following the news on the possible chemical attack in Syria	Yes	No	No	Yes
	Identifies characters and dynamics of international news	Identifies some characteristics	Identifies some characteristics / Not able to identify any characteristics	Not able to identify any characteristics	Identifies some characteristics / Not able to identify any characteristics
	Interpretation of the possible chemical attack in Syria	Dogmatic or categorical interpretation	N/A	Dogmatic or categorical interpretation	Cautious, prudent and reasoned interpretation
	Identifies possible bias	Yes, identifies bias	N/A	N/A	Yes, identifies bias
2. Digital Actions	Intentionally searching for information about an event when is not an headline anymore	Almost always	Very few times	Sometimes	Sometimes
	Trust in news	Sometimes	Sometimes / Almost always	Sometimes	Sometimes / Never / Very few times / Almost always
	Discussing on social media news about international issues	Never	Never	Sometimes	Almost always
	Sharing on social media news about international issues	Very few times	Never	Sometimes	Almost always
	“Like” news about international issues	Very few times	Almost always	Sometimes	Never
	Discussing the issue in person or on social media	Almost always	Never	Sometimes	Always
	Ideological stance	Not able to identify any ideological position	Not able to identify any ideological position	Not able to identify any ideological position	Identifies 2 out of 4
	Algorithm role	It is very dangerous	It is indifferent for me	I don't know what is an algorithm/ It is indifferent for me/ It is useful for me	I don't know what is an algorithm / It is indifferent for me / It is useful/ It is very dangerous
	Only read the headlines of a news	Almost always	Sometimes / Almost always	Sometimes / Almost always	Sometimes
3. Active Skepticism	Researching in order to validate an information	Sometimes	Never	Sometimes	Always
	Delve into an issue with other articles on the same topic	Sometimes	Never	Sometimes	Always

ing their own research to validate the information consumed. Those belonging to the Dogmatic Partisan group show great interest in what happens in the world, but without having the tools to critically approach international events, nor a very active and

skeptical attitude. Even if they are not able to identify media ownership or international news dynamics, nonetheless they are categorical in their answers about international issues. The Traditional Voter group and the Stateless one are showing certain apathy toward

world issues, a lack of general knowledge of the media industry, and no much civic responsibility. Suggesting a parallelism with citizens' responsibilities, the Traditional Voter fulfills the responsibility to go to vote in elections days, but without much more commitment in terms of civic attitude. The Stateless instead, without having a legally recognized nationality, assumes that it has no civic responsibilities.

## Conclusions

This research is based on the premise that a critical approach to news on international issues can be a first step in order to enable individuals' civic responsibilities as members of the world community. In order to achieve that, news consumer main responsibility is to be well informed and with a deeper knowledge of the world around us. This could lead to avoid stereotypes, different kind of discriminations, and enable the possibility for people to face together global common challenges.

It is possible to suggest here that in a possible model to critically approach international news, special emphasis should be given to the knowledge of dynamics and characteristics of international news, media structure and industry, and about where the news is produced. Basic knowledge of world geopolitics seems relevant too in order to understand possible media biases, along with the inclusion of other sources not necessarily journalistic, which could both help give more solid context to international events. The special focus of this study on an adult population highlighted the importance to give more attention to personal biases and on finding ways to challenge them. As a hint for future researches and its practical appliance in a news literacy model on international news, it looks important to better determine how to include issues of geopolitics and history in such model. This type of knowledge is normally part of people personal background and too extensive to be covered in an encompassing way in a probably limited international news literacy model. ❖

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# Journalism pondered as a learning facilitator tool in the context of lifelong learning

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## Abstract

In this environment of concerns about information disorders, preoccupations about critical knowledge about media and news literacy are in the front page. In this article we consider the relevance of teaching teachers (until 12th grade) in the specific context of a research project, Media In Action, on different issues of media literacy, news literacy and digital storytelling. We specif-

ically address the relevance of journalism as a learning tool, the need for lifelong learning approaches and the use of critical literacies.

**Keywords: Teachers training, media literacy, news literacy, digital storytelling.**



## Introduction

**T**he Media In Action project aims to produce support materials for teachers and learning facilitators in the confluence of Media literacy, news literacy and digital storytelling. Some research points the need to establish participatory and knowledge change connections between society, schools and journalists (Brites & Pinto, 2017; Tomé, 2008) and also to the learning environment that can arise in schools when projects regarding journalism practices facilitate student voices (Brites, 2015; Clark & Marchi, 2017; Freinet, 1993/1967; Tomé, 2008). Considering a multigenerational perspective, we can also point to recent studies (Contreras-Pulido, Marfil-Carmona & Ortega, 2014) that analysed groups of adults from different regions, among others, with the aim of implementing lifelong learning projects within the framework of media education. They concluded that most of these people do not believe in the veracity and usefulness of the media, questioning them permanently, instead of having specific and critical questioning as Hobbs suggests (2011). These are some of the aspects we are dealing with in the project Media In Action, that works with teachers/adults with the aim to also get to students/children and young people.

Anchored in the perspective that media literacy is a right (UNESCO, 1982; Frau-Meigs, 2017), Media In Action is an educator training project with a focus on learning the skills of media literacy through creating media to tell stories, specifically blogs, videos and podcasts. The project works directly with educators providing a blend of face-to-face training in theoretical and practical aspects of media literacy and media creation, alongside a bank of resources, lesson plans, and examples of good practice.

We opt to use a two way methodology, proposing a model of research based on the development of a more equitable experience between research and the communities and potentializing an exchange of communication between both poles (Koningstein & Azadegan, 2018). We also consider “the importance of allowing participants to define their individual and collective identities and desires as part of the research design, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up process.” (Koningstein & Azadegan, 2018, p. 14). We are setting the work on Paulo Freire’s insights (Freire, 1967, 1977/1975), that will maintain our focus on the

need for dialog with the other. He has established the Latin America framework for Communication for Development (C4D), but his insights are spread all over the world. C4D is transversal in MIA, not isolated in any one stage (Jenatsch & Bauer, 2016).

One of the great opportunities of the use of media possibilities in C4D projects is that the C4D approach is usually specifically employed in developing countries, whereas in the so-called developed world there are a lot of situations where the C4D approach is highly relevant but not used. We consider that C4D is valuable to consider in developed countries (Brites et al., 2017), based in dialog for social change (Freire, 1967; Jenatsch & Bauer, 2016; Ravenscroft, 2011) and should be based in local places, taking into consideration local needs (Freire, 1977/1975; Jenatsch & Bauer, 2016). In this context digital storytelling can be transformative, especially when used for people to express their voices (Jenatsch & Bauer, 2016).

Another aspect that we consider when working at this level is sustainability (Servaes, 2016). Sustainability is what can make a present project gain future perspective. This is of great relevance, especially because this is one of the great challenges that research and community projects face. The emphasis on sustainability will admit an engagement on “the complexity that communication research for development and social change routinely encounters.” (Servaes, 2016, p. 2).

Given this, in this article we will consider three relevant points for discussion when we are preparing training for teachers and educators in the field of media literacy, news literacy and digital storytelling: the use of journalistic tools in education, the approach as a lifelong project and how this can interrelate the benefit from critical literacies.

### **1—The use of journalistic tools in education.**

In this presentation, we argue for the importance of journalism as a learning tool (Brites, Santos, Jorge, & Catalão, 2017). Some research points the need to establish connections between schools and journalists (Brites & Pinto, 2017; Tomé, 2008) and also to the crucial learning environment that can arise in schools when projects regarding journalism practices facilitate student voices (Brites, 2011, 2015; Clark & Marchi, 2017; Freinet, 1993/1967; Tomé, 2008). In this context, we will specifically address digital storytelling journal-

istic techniques and their relevance in education.

Journalistic methodologies can improve storytelling skills and help with understanding and deconstructing media messages. Accepting the building blocks of journalism helps the understanding of how messages are built, and therefore allows the subject to be critical and analytical as they acquire better defences when confronting manipulative messages. The techniques used for storytelling are a lesson in mental structuring. For example, learning the basics of the inverted pyramid technique, and understanding how it works to facilitate ideas organisation by identifying the most interesting aspects of a story first, and then providing the details. Even if the story does not follow this technique, it provides a mental organisation for better assembly of ideas and more focussed storytelling (Kleemans, Schaap & Suijkerbuijk, 2017; Burum & Quinn, 2016). The ability to summarize and simplify

media (World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, 2017).

Participants learn video production and storytelling skills as well as how to use social media channels. There is also an emphasis on journalistic techniques of reporting facts and reporting sensitively. During the training, participants are cautioned about the risks of live-reporting and live-streaming, they are instead encouraged to first document a story with their own eyes before constructing a narrative and making a decision to broadcast (World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, 2017). The Omar's work with around 20 people in each country, 5 or 6 of whom go on to produce content for the project. Initial sharing is done through Facebook groups, the Omar's then work with the contributors to craft good quality stories, providing a measure of editorial control and ensuring that stories are authentic, verifiable and fact-checked (World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, 2017).

This method could easily be replicated on a smaller scale in the classroom by educators, and within communities who have the required knowledge and skills to use mobile devices for filming and editing. Many areas of digital and media literacy; from creating, sharing, consuming and understanding stories, can be learned in the process of creating a short video and the tools required are widely available.

## **2—The component of Lifelong education projects.**

Being an active citizen requires, among many other things, the use of digital technologies. Thus, at present, young people, adults, but also older people, have the opportunity to participate in social transformations through these means, thus moving away from any form of individual or social exclusion (Contreras-Pulido, Marfil-Carmona and Ortega, 2014, p. 2).

As the UNESCO Report "Learning: The Treasure Within" by Delors (1998, p. 34) stated at the time,

"it is the task of education to instil in children and adults the cultural foundations that will enable them to decipher as far as possible the meaning of the changes that are taking place. This requires a selection of the mass of information to better interpret it and situate events in a global histo-

*The ability to summarize and simplify is a simple and yet effective and powerful lesson that journalism can provide to education.*

is a simple and yet effective and powerful lesson that journalism can provide to education.

Another possible method to bridge the gap between education and journalism is to look at the less traditional tools such as mobile journalism and hyper-local reporting which may be more accessible to educators and classrooms and communities. Community methods are also likely to have multi-generational appeal.

Non-traditional methods such as that used in the Hashtag Our Stories project may stretch the boundaries of what is considered journalism but nevertheless can prove a powerful tool for democratising media and putting content creation into the hands of people with stories to tell. Yusuf and Sumaya Omar teach mobile journalism to groups and individuals in underserved countries and communities to equip people with the tools to tell their stories. The results are collated on Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, with the project giving stories a platform, some of the issues raised, have reached mainstream

ry. Thus, it stated that “education systems must respond to the many challenges posed by the information society, always in accordance with a continuous enrichment of knowledge and the exercise of a citizenship adapted to the demands of our times” (Delors, 1998, p. 34).

In line with this approach, Gozávez and Contreras-Pulido (2014, p. 131) affirm that “to be a citizen today is to be a citizen in the media. And this requires cultivating and educating the skills needed for a broad and comprehensive use of media and communication technologies” and this obviously includes all stages of life and therefore education, and especially media education, throughout life. Given this, it is of great relevance to remember the recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning, specially on learning to learn, social and civic competences, digital competences and cultural awareness and expression. And also to point to the recent improving of the eight competences (European Commission, 2017), namely on literacy.

Thus, Contreras-Pulido, Marfil-Carmona and Ortega (2014) focused on analysing a group of adults from different regions, among others, with the aim of implementing lifelong learning projects within the framework of media education. They came to the conclusion that most of these people do not believe in the veracity and usefulness of the media, question them permanently, leaving their mistrust exposed, but also the recognition of the need for true media literacy.

### **3 - Critical media literacies in action.**

With all the above, we believe that training for the production and consumption of information in a conscious, ethical and effective way will be a step forward in the development of a citizenship committed to itself and its environment (Gozávez & Contreras-Pulido, 2014). As Hobbs (2011) points, we need to ponder why critical questions work? Pedagogy of existence, ask questions as a form to learn, consider media literacy as an act of inquiring (Hobbs, 2011; Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2005). Like Mihailidis and Thevenin (2013, p. 1616) explain,

“the media literacy community’s commitment to democratic education and critical

pedagogy encourages the creation of classroom cultures and teacher–student relations that prepare students for self-directed learning. Traditional, hierarchical relations between teacher and students are avoided to facilitate sites of co-learning. Students are encouraged to collaborate with one another to identify challenges facing their communities, research these issues through critical analysis of media and other sources of evidence, and cooperate on creating and circulating alternative media that raise awareness about these issues and prompt political action”.

They also point that media literacy classrooms students’ are stimulated to observe media and society and their positions as consumers and citizens. At the same time, they also acquire the tools to “practice critique and collaboration in preparation for becoming political agents in a participatory democracy.” (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013, p. 1616). Media literacy is, in this sense, considered as “a core pedagogical framework for the emerging citizen in digital and participatory democracy.” (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013, p.

*Journalistic methodologies can improve storytelling skills and help with understanding and deconstructing media messages.*

1618). It is relevant to facilitate and prepare “citizens for engaged, inclusive, and participatory lifestyles, necessarily includes their ability to navigate the digital landscapes that offer them space for expression, participation, collaboration, and engagement in civic life.” (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013, p. 1618).

### **To track in the near future.**

Since our project is a work in progress, at this stage, rather than conclusions, we consider questions and clues towards our work in the future, based on the previous discussion. Given this:

**1—Sustainability.** This is often seen as a last stage of a project and often forgotten. However, it gives a sense of direction to the project, because the media

literacy projects needs time to evolve and produce an impact (Servaes, 2016).

**2—Media literacy and news literacies are in the principal stage.** The fears related with “fake news” place media literacy associated questions in the public discourse, how will this actually work for the field of media literacy?

**3—Citizens and journalism.** The need for transparency between a journalist and its public is more and more important, this can bring journalists to consider media literacy as one of their tasks (Brites & Pinto, 2017).

**4—Media literacy as a right.** Media education is a right (UNESCO, 1982; Frau-Meigs, 2017), it is necessary to make efforts to make it possible to have media literate citizens (Brites, Amaral & Catarino, 2018). Journalism can be a powerful tool (Brites et al., 2017) in these processes and in articulation with people’s life.

**5 - Media literacy and people’s contexts.** Media literacy only makes sense in close articulation with the contexts of everyday life and with the daily needs of the citizens. ❖

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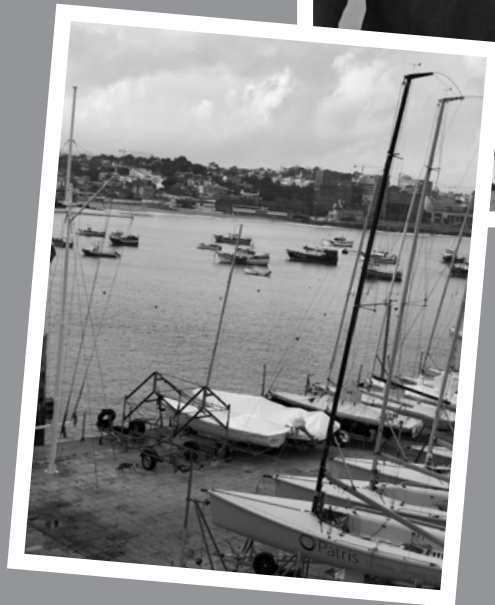
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“Instead of just critiquing the voice, we’re trying to help people think about their voice in the community, the agency they have and what means they take to participate. Media literacy needs to be about connectivity, about engagement — and it needs to be intentionally civic.”  
— Paul Mihailidis, *New York Times*



“Participation is seen as a political-ideological concept that is intrinsically linked to power.” — Nico Carpentier, *Media and Participation A Site of Ideological-Democratic Struggle*



# A Novel Civic IDEA

## Building the capacity of youth to critique and create media in digital culture

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### Abstract

This essay articulates a model for media literacies that embrace a more robust civic infrastructure and intentionality. This model responds to a digital culture that prioritizes the extraction of data, algorithmic ambivalence, and spectacle as a form of normative information distribution. It is against this backdrop that media literacies must prioritize their civic intentions, and the values that support them. To support this argument, this paper introduces a civic media literacy toolkit, Civic IDEA, designed to explicitly move learners from knowledge to action. Civic IDEA envisions a media literacy process that scales knowledge into action, and that focuses on using digital technologies for building voice and agency in a participatory capacity. IDEA stands for Inquiry, Deliberation, Expression and Advocacy. Each module in this framework is supported by a set of value constructs that support what Peter Levine calls civic renewal, deliberate civic action taking by communities that supports media practices that reform community structures for inclusion, equity, and meaningful engagement in daily life.

**Keywords:** Civic media, agency, digital literacy, data, deliberation, expression, advocacy

### Introduction

In recent years, fringe activist groups intent on spreading false information, politicians exploiting fake news to advance agendas, and bots spreading sensationalized content are increasingly present in our daily digital feeds. These emerging information and communication practices have destabilized the core functions of media in democratic societies. In their report *Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online*, Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis explore how internet subcultures “leverage both the techniques of participatory culture and the affordances of social media to spread their various beliefs.”<sup>1</sup> They write:

Taking advantage of the opportunity the internet presents for collaboration, communication, and peer production, these groups target vulnerabilities in the news media ecosystem to increase the visibility of and au-

dience for their messages. While such subcultures are diverse, they generally package themselves as anti-establishment in their reaction against multiculturalism and globalism, while promoting racist, anti-feminist, and anti-Semitic ideologies.<sup>2</sup>

The rise of internet subcultures to advance ideological and partisan stances has impacted the credibility and trust of civic institutions. In the United States, fringe groups using Reddit and 4Chan are able to successfully seed and scale false information campaigns about mainstream political candidates that continue to have major impacts on local and national political elections. At the same time, governments around the world are asserting increasing control over digital media and social networks to advance agendas, or to monitor and manipulate online communication of their citizenries. In the wake of a 2016 attempted coup in Turkey, the government cracked down on citizens through social media monitoring, leading to the detainment and jailing of thousands. In Syria, government monitoring of mobile phones led to the specific targeting of civic activists and opposition parties. Online networks increased the presence of nationalist parties in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Sweden, and put into question the trust of major media and civic institutions. The 2017 nationalist rally in Poland, which gathered over 60,000 people, was initiated by alternative media and social networks beyond what any mainstream media outlets could achieve.

Marwick and Lewis describe a vast digital infrastructure that allows for groups to propagate and manipulate information, and to allow that information to scale at prolific rates. Subcultures employ techniques that range from the development of bots to the appropriation of memes that collectively leverage the capacity of vibrant participatory networks to amplify messages without relying on mainstream media. In their report Marwick and Lewis highlight a lack of trust in media, the decline of local news, and the complicity of mainstream media outlets who have to compete for “eyeballs” in an attention economy, to articulate the vulnerabilities present in digital culture that allow alternative groups to have such power online. As a result, write Marwick and Lewis, “New and old me-

dia alike employ software that provides detailed data that shows exactly which articles get the most clicks, shares, likes, and comments. This allows newspapers and blogs to tailor future content to drive their metrics up, incentivizing low-quality but high-performing posts over high-quality journalism.”<sup>3</sup>

The role of mainstream media in the rise of false and manipulative information has ramifications for the overall trust that people place in media. In a report for the *Tow Center*, Craig Silverman finds that amidst the “onslaught of hoaxes, misinformation, and other forms of inaccurate content that flow constantly over digital platforms,”<sup>4</sup> news and media organizations spend inordinate amounts of time and energy engaging in the verification and debunking of information that emerges online from internet subcultures. As a result, Silverman writes, “rather than acting as a source of accurate information, online media frequently promote misinformation in an attempt to drive traffic and social engagement.”<sup>5</sup> The growing landscape of distrust, manipulation and prolific Internet subcultures is supported by technological infrastructures that prioritize the growth of like-minded networks<sup>6</sup> where peer support and validation are prioritized over “professional news sources” for judging the credibility of information.<sup>7</sup> This landscape is further entrenched by massive technology conglomerates that are more powerful than ever before,<sup>8</sup> and that regulatory bodies have little control over. As a result, their algorithms dictate how and where information travels, often prioritizing attention over depth, extracting data over providing diversity, and favoring the sensational over the subtle.<sup>9</sup>

In the wake of these new realities for media and information in digital culture, many in government, non-governmental and policy positions have called for media literacy pedagogies and practices to respond.<sup>10</sup> Foundations are devoting significant resources to explore the role of technologies and news in society, and exploring how media literacies can support more critical, vibrant and active communities.<sup>11</sup> These initiatives focus largely on the ways that citizens, and primarily young people, can be better equipped with the skills and competencies to navigate and meaningfully participate in daily civic life in a ubiquitous, complex and increasingly influential digital culture.

This essay argues for an approach to media liter-

acies that embrace a more robust civic infrastructure and intentionality. To support this argument, this essay describes the development of a civic media literacy toolkit, Civic IDEA, which is designed to explicitly move learners from knowledge to action. The process that supports this arc focuses on envisioning media literacies as positioned to scale knowledge to action, and to build learners focused on using digital technologies for building voice and agency in a participatory capacity. IDEA stands for Inquiry, Deliberation, Expression and Advocacy. Each module in this framework is supported by a set of value constructs that support what Peter Levine calls civic renewal, deliberate civic action taking by communities that supports media practices that reform community structures for inclusion, equity, and meaningful engagement in daily life.

### **Media Literacies and the Capacity to Act**

Media literacies have long been positioned as a set of skills and competencies centered on critical media deconstruction, analysis, comprehension, creation and engagement. Media literacy pedagogies and practices generally focus on increasing the ability for people to

cies in users.<sup>14</sup> Organizations often lack resources to devote to training in new technologies, and lack access to the technological skills and experiences needed to create savvy technological responses. In the 2016 report titled *Digital Crossroads: Civic Media and Migration*,<sup>15</sup> Mihailidis, Racin & Gordon examined how civil society organizations (CSOs) working with refugee or migrant populations in host countries were building media capacities of young people 16-25 years old. The report found that organizations struggle to build effective media literacy practices with young people. Organizations lack both the tools and approaches for implementing media literacy skill sets and dispositions focused on creating pathways for people to safely and effectively participate in civic or political discourse. Organizations particularly struggle to find effective communication initiatives in an increasingly fragmented and polarized media landscape. They also lack the capacity and infrastructure to devote proper resources to respond. As a result, many organizations that participated in the study were starved for media and digital literacy training that would help them leverage information and communication technologies to both better engage with communities and help community stakeholders meaningfully participate in daily civic life.

Formal spaces of education face similar challenges. Schools have less time, space (figuratively and literally) and resources to support media and digital literacy training for teachers. And curricular sequences offer less and less space for media literacies to exist as more than peripheral within classrooms, libraries and learning commons. As a result, teachers are faced with increasing tools at their disposal, but less familiarity with how to employ these tools in productive and meaningful ways. And with student bodies that often have a sophistication with media use that equals or surpasses that of the teacher. This problem is compounded by the fast evolving tools and technologies that far outpace the capabilities for educational bodies to respond.<sup>16</sup>

To respond to the fractures that have emerged in organizations and institutions of education, media literacy initiatives must be positioned to build the capacity of youth to be more engaged citizens through the creation and distribution of civic media.<sup>17</sup>

The connection between teaching skills of me-

### *The role of mainstream media in the rise of false and manipulative information has ramifications for the overall trust that people place in media.*

critically evaluate and analyze media texts, produce content, understand media system and structures, reflection on media representations in society, and use media to effectively participate in daily civic life.<sup>12</sup> More recently media literacy pedagogies have incorporated specific disciplines, or sub-literacies, such as data, news, health, critical making, and DIY that respond to the pervasive and increasingly central role that media and mediated platforms play in society.<sup>13</sup>

While positioning media literacy as a solution to problems that emerge with rapid technological advancements makes sense in theory, in practice organizations and educators working with youth in formal and informal learning environments often struggle to keep pace with fast evolving technologies, tools, and social networks that elicit unique skills and competen-



dia critique and creation is complicated. Recent research has found that media literacy interventions in formal schooling can increase learners' knowledge about politics, news, and general civic information.<sup>18</sup> Research has also found that increased critical analysis and deconstruction skills can lead to increased cynicism and disengagement from media.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, few media literacy initiatives focus explicitly on connecting critical inquiry with active engagement, and doing so by deploying accessible technologies focused on creation, implementation, and action taking.<sup>20</sup>

The Civic IDEA toolkit, designed in 2018, is positioned to build on the potential of media literacy to increase meaningful engagement and active participation in daily life. The focus of the toolkit is to harness the availability of tools and technologies that can be incorporated in media literacy pedagogies for explicit civic adoption. In this way, Civic IDEA prioritizes how media literacy pedagogies and practices can incorporate civic action taking into their learning experiences. Each module in the IDEA framework—Investigate, Deliberate, Express, and Advocate—is designed to create a pathway for the learner to move from the point of investigating information online, to deliberating about the information with peers, to forming personal expression, to transforming that expression into digital advocacy. Modules are anchored by interactive digital learning tools and series of activity guides that facilitate fun and creative inquiries. For the investigate module, *Databasic*<sup>21</sup> is a simple online tool that allows users to quickly analyze data sets, look for correlations, and create visualizations and connections. For deliberation, *@Stake*<sup>22</sup> is a mobile role playing game that enables small groups to deliberate about civic issues they define themselves. For expression, *MediaBreaker*<sup>23</sup> allows youth to input and remix visual content to express themselves in relation to mainstream media narratives. And for expression, *Emerging Citizens*<sup>24</sup> encourages civic advocacy through popular social media modalities, such as Twitter, Wikipedia and memes. Collectively, these tools and guides are positioned to move learners from the point of critical inquiry to practicing media literacy that prioritizes active engagement and participation in daily civic life.<sup>25</sup>

Civic IDEA builds from research that explores

the effectiveness of using data for teaching and learning in community contexts,<sup>26</sup> on the potential for online deliberation to improve civil dialog and public engagement,<sup>27</sup> on remix as enhancing critical inquiry and expression,<sup>28</sup> and on advocacy as a means of

*Media literacies have long been positioned as a set of skills and competencies centered on critical media deconstruction, analysis, comprehension, creation and engagement.*

bringing voice and agency more directly into the daily lives of young people.<sup>28</sup> Collectively, Civic IDEA prioritizes knowledge that is explicitly transformed into civic action taking, and that supports voice, agency and participation as the cornerstones for effective and safe engagement in daily life. The IDEA framework is also designed to build a more explicit connection between media literacy pedagogies and the capacity for young people to act in the world.

### **A Civic Media approach to learning and engagement**

Civic IDEA prioritizes the civic outcomes of media literacy pedagogies. Civic outcomes refer to the direct connections between learning to critique and create media, and applying that newfound knowledge to processes that involve investigation, deliberation, expression and advocacy. To facilitate this goal, the IDEA framework builds upon recent work around civic media, defined by Gordon and Mihailidis as:

“the technologies, designs, and practices that produce and reproduce the sense of being in the world with others toward common good...civic media, then, is any mediated practice that enables a community to imagine themselves as being connected, not through achieving, but through striving for common good.”<sup>30</sup>

In their 2018 report on *Civic Media Practice*, Gordon and Mugar build on this definition by articulating, “There are two important aspects of this defi-

dition: 1) “striving for” suggests process over product, and 2) “common good” suggests a shared set of negotiated values driving the work. Before every finished product, before every celebrated new initiative, values, interests, and power dynamics must be navigated and negotiated.”<sup>31</sup>

Media literacy interventions embrace civic media practice through a focus on public impact and fostering a common good. This orientation helps media literacy move from beyond distanced critique, interpretation without application, and a focus on tools and technologies over the processes and applications that define them. Continue Gordon and Mugar:

All uses of technology are not equivalent: underlying every new tool or technology is a series of decisions and negotiations that lead to its invention or adoption. Optimized efficiency is not always desirable when the higher priority is assuring that a community’s voice is heard, that a process is fair, or that the most vulnerable are able to safely express themselves. Attentiveness to the values underlying technology is necessary to understand the contemporary civic transformation.<sup>32</sup>

In focusing on the process and potential of media literacies, the civic IDEA framework supports research at the intersection of technology and civic engagement that demonstrates the need for approaches to civic en-

*In this way, Civic IDEA prioritizes how media literacy pedagogies and practices can incorporate civic action taking into their learning experiences.*

gagement systems with deep user immersion, defined as both experiential and challenge-based, where the user can easily make the connection between knowledge acquired and possible actions to take.<sup>33</sup> This focus is reinforced by scholarship showing that increased civic activity online can promote constructive civic behavior offline: from supporting causes, to raising local awareness about social issues.<sup>34</sup> Civic IDEA is also mo-

tivated by a focus on “real-world” engagement, where applications to conditions in daily life can increase content retention and bolster young people’s ability to transfer abstract concepts to other domains.<sup>35</sup>

This approach supports a focus not only on skills but also responds to emerging norms of digital culture, where media literacies, according to Mihailidis, are “designed to bring people together in support of solving social problems, reinventing spaces for meaningful engagement, [and] creating positive dialog in communities.”<sup>36</sup> While many initiatives focus on the measurement of assessing civic engagement in learning contexts,<sup>37</sup> Civic IDEA builds specifically on work that looks at young people’s ability to effectively participate in digital communities.<sup>38</sup> Effective participation in this context means moving beyond skill acquisition and towards a sense of situated agency that moves learners from “articulating concern to a capacity to act.”<sup>39</sup>

### **Beyond “Skills”—From Responsibility to Accountability**

For as long as media literacies have been formalized as a pedagogical movement, they have prioritized skills and competencies as core learning mechanisms. Prioritizing evaluation, analysis, comprehension, interpretation, and creation, advocates argue, “empower people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators and active citizens.”<sup>40</sup> More recent articulations of media literacy skills incorporate technological fluencies like play, performance, remix, appropriation and negotiation,<sup>41</sup> and a focus on creation, reflection and action taking,<sup>42</sup> that help learners navigate skillfully through digital platforms and ubiquitous information ecosystems.

Approaches to media literacy that prioritize skills and ability are valuable in helping people to build critical knowledge sets and competencies for message interpretation. They prepare learners to be critical in their inquiry into media systems and their interpretation of messages. Skills-based approaches to media literacy, at the same time, often necessitate *critical detachment* from messages, where a healthy distance from a message helps to ensure balanced deconstruct. They prioritize *transactional* approaches to skill building, where once skills are learned, a level of media “literacy” has been acquired. And perhaps most impor-

tantly, skills-based media literacies often work from the perspective of *individual responsibility*. In *The Age of Responsibility*, scholar Yascha Mounk argues that a focus on personal responsibility has contributed to the fracturing of civic life in Western democracies, and sowed the seeds of partisanship and polarization. Writes Mounk:

Nowadays, when politicians promise their followers that they believe in “individual” or “personal” responsibility, they do not mean that each of us has a duty to make life better for others, or even to make sacrifices for our nation. What they mean is that we must strive to be self-sufficient—and that the extent to which we have lived up to this responsibility determines how willing the collectivity should be to help us in an hour of need.

Media literacy pedagogies often adopt a “responsibility as accountability” frame, which asks the individual to learn how to better navigate media, and are often detached from the collective or social elements of such responsibilities.<sup>44</sup> Anecdotally, we see the results of a responsibility frame embedded in the increasingly partisan and polarizing expression online, where people use digital media to advocate ideas and ideologies without the accountability of engagement with others in civil discourse.

Civic IDEA addresses this concern by situating skill sets in tools and technologies that focus on real world problem solving, and the transfer of skills to the modeling of active civic participation with others in the world. Each of the modules in the IDEA framework, by incorporating tools that model core civic engagement processes and means for acting in daily life, emphasize the placement of skills into the real world. Gordon and Mihailidis refer to this as the “usability of knowledge.” “The usability of knowledge,” they argue, “[is] the process of creating and sharing knowledge that takes the learner, and the learner’s place in the world, into consideration. Usability suggests that knowledge is open-ended, capable of accommodating a range of user experiences, and appropriately cultivated within the social experience of learning.”<sup>45</sup> This usability includes applying investigation skills to tell



visually compelling and rich stories with public data, applying negotiation skills to effectively deliberate across stakeholder roles in communities, applying analysis skills to remix and share media messages for more diverse interpretations of media messaging, and applying skills of expression and production to public advocacy through popular social communication technologies.

In this way, the components of civic IDEA are focused on how knowledge becomes activated in the real world. The values that inform this transition support how people use media to support a common good.

### Unpacking Civic IDEA

What makes the IDEA toolkit unique is the facilitation that connects each module to a learning frame-



work, and that scaffolds the engagement within a process that takes users from inquiry to advocacy. Civic IDEA prioritizes the ability for its users to use data

to create compelling visuals and stories, to effectively deliberate with peers about issues in the media, to challenge dominant media narratives through remix, and to create and disseminate media-based advocacy campaigns through popular social media modalities. These objectives are met through both building learner engagement with hands-on and creative activities that promote active participation with information. Each module of the Civic IDEA toolkit, while capable of standing alone, is ordered to move learners from investigation to advocacy. Learners are able to build sequentially from the point of investigation to that of deliberation, expression and advocacy.

### Investigation

Media literacy prioritizes deep critical inquiry and investigation as a core skill set. This is often activated through the evaluation of media texts, message interpretation, and analysis of the structures and systems that support media message creation, distribution and reception. In the IDEA framework, facilitators and participants work together to explore different ways to interpret texts through data analysis, visualization and storytelling. The *Databasic* tools allow learners to compare texts of political speeches, news stories, press releases or any other relevant media texts. Learners compare across texts, looking for similarities, differences, exploring word frequencies, and looking at the ways in which networks impact the spread of content online.

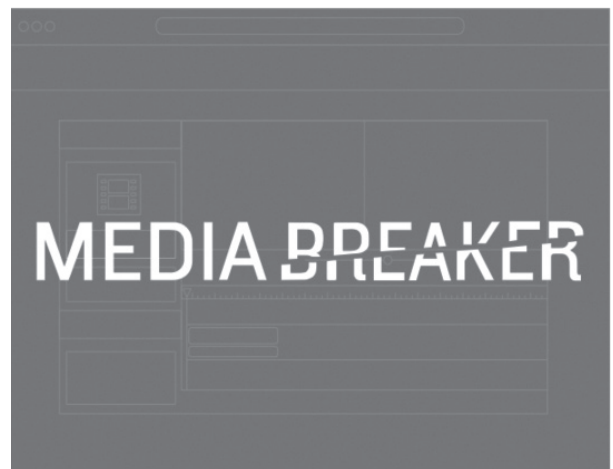
What makes Investigation unique is that the skills of access, analysis, and evaluation are activated through students learning how to use data in visually creative, fun and dynamic ways. The outcomes of data inquiry process can be used to understand how infor-



mation travels online, how it is positioned, who and what are prioritized, and how we can explore multiple interpretations of media narratives through creative storytelling. Investigation, in this sense, becomes an active learning pursuit, and not simply a process of distanced critical deconstruction.

### Deliberation

Deliberation is often left off the radar of media literacy pedagogies. But it is an essential skill for learning how to engage in civil dialog around contemporary issues, and to assess the credibility of media in the process. Through *@Stake*, learners will source issues of present concern in their communities, be assigned stakeholder



roles (parent, local government official, activist, journalist, etc.), and engage in dialogue around the issue from their assumed role. Learners will negotiate with others in the game, and through this process, learn the art of deliberation.

Deliberation here embraces media literacy skills focused on assessing the credibility of information and understanding how to apply that information to a current community issue. In their role, learners will use information to advocate for a stance, to make a persuasive argument, or to attempt to convince others of the veracity of their perspective. Other players will need to assess the credibility of this position, its impact on the community, and the tradeoffs involved with civic decision-making. As a result, learners are constantly negotiating the credibility of information with the performance of subject position, and the desire to “win” the game.

## Expression

Media literacy focuses on the creation of media messages as a core expressive skill. Learners use accessible technologies to learn how to tell stories, frame messages, and create content about issues of concern. Often production practices are about media topics, or focus on analysis and reflection about these stories. In the IDEA framework, expression takes the form of actively appropriating existing content, and remixing it to shift the narrative.



In the expression process, users learn digital editing techniques through the remix process. They select an issue, find existing video content about that issue, upload into the *MediaBreaker* platform, and using an easy-to-use editing suite, re-imagine the narrative of the video. Through this process they learn production and editing techniques, and at the same time they learn how to analyze content and understand how messages are framed, what they prioritize, and who they intend to attract. During the remix, learners will engage in these questions as they experiment with voice over, textual remix, art, and graphics that shift the intention of the message. Using real texts, from political speeches to newscasts and advertisements, helps learners think about expression through reframing of messages created and distributed by professionals with intended outcomes.

## Advocacy

Learning to use media to advance a cause, advocate on behalf of issues or positions, and to give voice and

exposure to marginalized communities is central to the civic goals of media literacy pedagogy. With an abundance of free and easy to use tools, young people are able to reach greater and more diverse communities, faster, and without the need of extensive resources. Despite the potential of these tools, often times it is challenging to help young people understand how to activate their voice and build media messages that they can use to be agents of social change.

Advocacy in the IDEA framework helps learners develop agency through the application of popular social technologies—memes, hashtags and wikipedia—to civic purposes. Learners explore the role of these forms of communication on how people can leverage humor, wit, and creative content to advocate in relevant and engaging ways. Through playful mechanics that ask learners to create memes and hashtags, and select which are most engaging, they learn how to make resonant content while reflecting on what makes a hashtag scale, why memes can be powerful tools for civic action taking, and how hyperconnected online content can help people better navigate the web for fluid knowledge acquisition. Through *Emerging Citizens*, learners strive to become everyday advocates on behalf of community betterment.

## Civic IDEA: Knowledge into Action

Civic IDEA aims to build the capacity of young people to be effective participants in their societies. Through a media literacy facilitation, IDEA embraces what Philosopher Peter Levine calls civic renewal, in which “people must change the norms and structures of

*Approaches to media literacy that prioritize skills and ability are valuable in helping people to build critical knowledge sets and competencies for message interpretation.*

their own communities through deliberate civic action—something that they are capable of doing quite well.” In societies that rely more and more on media to facilitate daily engagement, how people think about changing the norms and structures of communities must necessarily incorporate how they understand media and their ability to actively use media for civic purposes.

Media literacies that support civic renewal embrace the types of deliberation, participation, and engagement that reflect a commitment to reforming communities. What this means in a ubiquitous digital culture is different than how we traditionally understand media and its role in democracy. Civic IDEA attempts to situate a media literacy process into how communities explore and realize change. Through the tools and the activity guides that support them, IDEA puts into practice a scaffolded learning experience that moves learners from critical inquirers to active media makers who advocate for stronger, more inclusive and supportive communities. ❖

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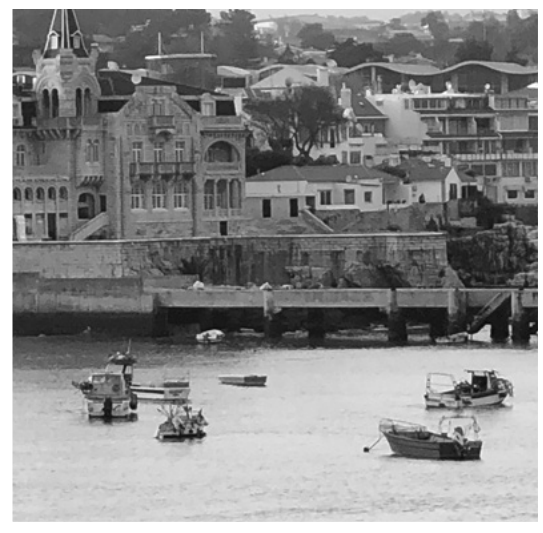
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“Media Literacy is now being seen as a panacea or solution.”  
— Paul Mihailidis, *Slate*



“We tend to see participation as both a tool to further democratize our society and as the outcome of that democratization process. So, in this view, it has to be a progressive force that protects citizens from domination by privileged groups and empowers the citizenry to gain more control over their everyday lives.”

— Nico Carpentier, *Participations: Dialogues on the Participatory Promise of Contemporary Culture and Politics*





# Role of Educators in Forming of Media Image of Educational Organization: Media Literacy Aspect

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## Abstract

Media reality plays a very important role in the modern world. Media influences all spheres of life of any organization. Essentially, the definition of corporate communications was changed. A great place in media space is occupied by media communications and the formation of the image of the organization in the media sphere. In recent years, the influence of company employees in shaping the media image of the organization has grown. The media image takes a special place in social organizations, especially in the educational sphere.

**Keywords: Media literacy, corporate communication, global communication, media image**

**T**he modern world is a world of media. Media affects in all aspects of social, economic, communication and educational spheres.

Corporate communications in the modern world have undergone significant changes. First of all, the understanding and definition of corporate communications have changed. Cees van Real & Charles Forbrun [1, p.15] notes that corporate communication is a set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed at creating favorable point of view among stakeholders on which the company depends. This definition

is more in line with the objectives of the educational organization, because of its boundaries and scope of activity form the needs of stakeholders.

In modern education system stakeholders are playing the key role. Their influence and requirements to the corporate communications are changed substantially last years.

According to the modern definition in education, the term stakeholder typically refers to anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students, including administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councilors, and state representatives. Stakeholders may also be collective entities, such as local businesses, organizations, advocacy groups, committees, media outlets, and cultural institutions, in addition to organizations that represent specific groups, such as teachers’ unions, parent-teacher organizations, and associations representing superintendents, principals, school boards, or teachers in specific academic disciplines (e.g., the National Council of Teachers of English or the Vermont Council of Teachers of Mathematics). In a word, stakeholders have a “stake” in the school and its students, meaning that they have personal, professional, civic, or financial interest or concern.[2, p.1] Such a change in the educational landscape has also changed the media requirement for the organization’s image.

According to PWC survey the main spheres of risk in education field are: strategic, operational, reporting, compliance [3, p.7] And the interests of stakeholders, internal and external, are lying in all these spheres. In media, we can see the reflection of reality, media image is the reflection of media reality. And all facts, achievements, images, information, comments, fakenews, lie, materials of planned information attack are forming the media image, which also depends of interests of stakeholders. And one of the key objects in this case is the reputation risk in media reality.

Modern corporate communications are global in nature. This is facilitated by the development of digital technologies, and the use of modern tools of social communication by educators. We live in multicultural and media world. The role of educator is not only explaining to pupils how to live here but also feel himself comfortable in this world. The development of messengers, social networks, the YouTube platform and other communication tools expand and blur the boundaries of the organization. And, in this case, media image of an organization became more dependent from social media, and presence stakeholders in it.

Social media now together with websites became the point of contacts with society for educational organizations. And information, which we can find there not just diverse, but contradictory. For example, social media in modern global communications carry a double load [4, p. 237]. On the one hand, many educational organizations have their own website, public pages in social networks, official taxes, etc. The content of such points of contact is formed in the interests of the global policy of the organization. However, on the other hand, many teachers and employees have personal pages on social networks, personal & professional blogs and vlogs, use messengers. And this content does not affect the media image of the organization to a lesser extent. according to our survey this year, 17% of first year students of the Faculty of Journalism looked for information about our faculty in personal blogs and the accounts of teachers and students of the Faculty of Journalism. And only 12% of first year students of the Faculty of Political Science did this. At the same time, approximately 80% of the first-year students surveyed by the two faculties noted that such sources of information are really important.

Social networks in general in an educational organization allow solving the following complex tasks as student recruitment, promotion of research and innovation, an alumni engagement and fundraising tool, crisis communications tool, etc. [5, p.15] And in this case, it's necessary to note that understanding the behavior models is the key competency for educator. Media literacy now isn't only safety but also proactively understanding and using two keys factors: the discovery of the "active" audience and the rapid expansion of digital media in educational contexts [6, p. 68].

In this regard, the importance of media security is growing significantly. Understanding the fundamentals of media literacy by teachers, the ability to critically comprehend and understand media information create not just a positive but meaningful media image of the organization. This media image will have a polymorphic character, but at the same time reputational risks for the educational organization will be reduced.

In conclusion, it's necessary to mention that the erosion and expansion of the organization's boundaries in the modern media and communication space will only expand, new stakeholders will be included in the process. This process will significantly change the media image of the educational organization in the global space. ✱

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# Is there an influence between the relationships mediated by digital contexts and learning environments' social climate? A research in Italian and French secondary schools.

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## Abstract

Young pre-teens attending junior high schools are going through a very delicate period: they are not just engaged in a new and more complex school career, but they are also engaged in their daily tasks of training and negotiating their identities and their roles in the different peer groups. This complex scenario is expanded by their first experiences, far from the eyes of adults, with technologies: tools that add, on the relational universe just described, an existential dimension that opens up new forms of communication mediated by digital contexts. The contributions presents a research run in 2 Italian and 2 French schools, which involved 365 students and 21 teachers in order to provide an answer to these questions: Is there an influence of the technologies on the relational dynamics that occur between students and students and between students and teachers? Which kind of relationship? Which kind of relational dynamics and of technologies are involved? Is there an influence between the relationships mediated by digital contexts and the social climate of a learning environment? Which kind of relationship?

**Keywords:** ICT's, mediated environments, digital literacy, digital citizenship, media literacy

## The learning environments' social climate

It is by now several decades that the research community is engaged in the study around the topic of learning environments. One of the firsts contributors was Dewey, who identified an *environment* as the sum of “those conditions that promote or hinder, stimulate or inhibit, the characteristic activities of a living being” (Dewey, 1916, p. 45). In this sense, an environment is seen as a “medium” which plays a fundamental role as facilitator or inhibitor of learning processes and social interactions. A concept of classroom emerges as a “systemic environment” (Moos, 1979) organized in four variables: physical environment, organization elements, characteristics of classrooms' actors and social climate. For Moos, social climate doesn't represent simply one of the variables but it's considered as “the main mediator of the other three's influences” (Moos, 1979, p. 10), an ensemble that the researcher

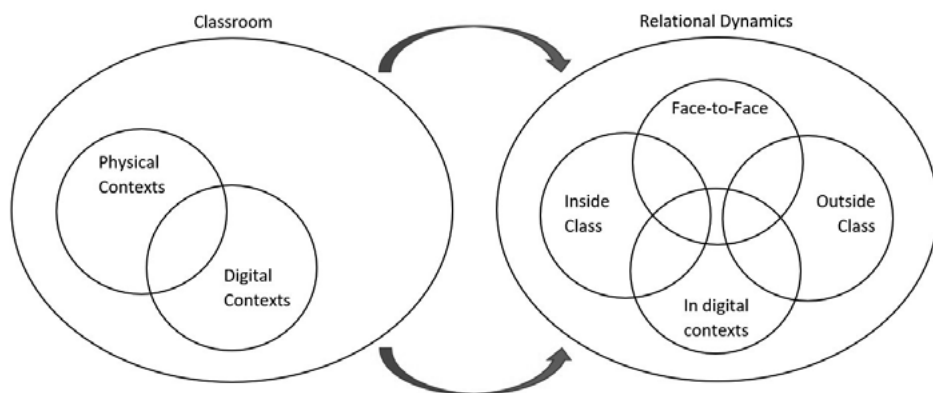
considers open: determined not only by internal factors (rules, relationships inside the classroom, school's policies...) but also external (families, extra-scholastic contexts...) (Renati & Zanetti, 2009).

It is in the frame of this debate that one can find the concept of social climate, a concept widely approached by researchers, often associated to “ecologic” terms like “atmosphere”, “environment” or “milieu.” Parker and Kaltsounis (1986) consider it a relational atmosphere established by all the interaction's models inside a class (decision making processes, students' participation models, way of dealing with problems ...). More recently, Ambrose and his group (2010) identified it as the “ensemble of intellectual, social, emotional and physical milieux where students learn”. One of the most comprehensive definitions come from Allodi (2010): she uses the terminology of “Learning Environments' Social Climate” (LESC) to define all those psycho-social characteristics of learning environments which model the relationships teachers-students and students-peers. Her work, in line with others like Adelman & Taylor (2005), Chiari (1994) and Genovese & Kanisza (1989), identifies as elements that impact on LESC, students' and teachers' expectations and behaviours, teachers' communication and classroom management's style and interpersonal relationships and group dynamics.

Even if one can find materials about the influence of ICTs on learning processes, it's not possible to state the same regarding the influence of ICTs in schools on a social-relational angle. In other words, there's a lack of findings in scientific literature, regarding the influence of the interactions that take place on digital contexts on the learning environments' social climate.

These interactions, though, play a key role among the very dense relational network that one can find in contexts like secondary schools, where pre-adolescents (11-15) are living a very delicate moment of

their development: not only are they facing a new and more challenging school career, but they are also engaged in shaping and negotiating their identities and their roles. Pre-adolescents seek primarily two things: autonomy from their adult models (Winnicott, 1961) and the recognition of their peers (Iaquinta & Salvo, 2017). At this already-enough-complex “emotional storm” (Winnicott, 1961), has been added an layer of complexity represented by technologies (boyd, 2014; Ito et al., 2010). Youngsters, 11-15 years of age, are experiencing the use of ICTs and social media more and more, and this happens far from their parents vigilance, and instead, in their rooms or when they are outside as well as when they are at school.



### A dialogic model

Being a teen in the networked age is “complicated” (boyd, 2014) but also so full of new communication opportunities. Now youngsters can interact seamlessly with their peers, from the very moment where they wake up, till they go to bed (Caron & Caronia, 2007). They don't interact anymore exclusively through traditional face-to-face exchanges, but through exchanges mediated by digital contexts.

Within this framework, a classroom can be considered as an intersection between physical and digital contexts, and it's in a relationship of reciprocal influence with the universe of relational dynamics that interest students, teachers and families. Similarly, the relational dynamics involved can also be seen as an intersection between four dimensions of interaction: inside class, outside class, face-to-face and online relational dynamics.

Going deep in the problematization, two categories of digital contexts have been identified: Official Digital Contexts (ODC), and Non-Official Digital Context (NoDC).

ODCs gather all those digital environments provided officially, and formally recognized as valid for work and school-related practices and exchanges, by school institutes. To this categorization belong elements such as electronic platforms used to manage the class-register, Learning Content Management Systems, communication systems between teachers, parents, students, and other services for cloud computing and collaborative online work.

NoDCs include all those platforms and digital environments that are spontaneously used by students, teachers and parents which are not formally recognized, nor provided, by school institutes. Some examples are IM services like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and other social media like Snapchat or Instagram.

These digital contexts have a relationship of continuity with physical and offline ones: it's really difficult that one particular dynamic belongs exclusively to an offline or an online ODC/NoDC context. The individuals involved are the same and, if an information—a bad note—is issued by a specific official or non-official digital context or via written or face-to-face communication, this will have in all cases consequences and reactions in all the rest of the contexts.

### The research

With all the new opportunities that ICT have brought, peoples—and of course students, too—have more and more occasions to interact in many ways. This thick and seamless network of interactions assumes an existential dimension which cannot be embanked neither from the boundaries of the class, neither relegated to the scholastic schedules, beyond the sense of place and time (Meyrowitz, 1986).

The use of group chats, the fact that teens don't separate from their devices not even when they're attending lessons are only few of the problems that are connected to the presence of ICTs in schools. Issues and concerns that are becoming more and more difficult to analyze and to manage which need to be taken

in consideration with a profound, critical and honest gaze. One of biggest issue is that normally ICTs are allowed in schools only for educational and cognitive

*The use of group chats, the fact that teens don't separate from their devices not even when they're attending lessons are only few of the problems that are connected to the presence of ICTs in schools. .*

purposes, so the trend is to ignore or forbid everything that concerns a different use of them.

The point of the research was to: give a phenomenological overview of the issue which would help professionals in the field of education to have a better understanding of the influence of digital-contexts-mediated-relationships on social climate in educational settings; raise a reflection on the lack of consideration of digital-contexts-mediated-relationships among the elements that determine, or which have some kind of influence, on the social climate of learning environments; hypothesise some pedagogical priority, and some possible future research development.

The research-questions that guided the entire work are as follows:

- Is there an influence of the technologies on the relational dynamics that occur between students and students and between students and teachers? Which kind of relationship? Which kind of relational dynamics and of technologies are involved?
- Is there an influence between the relationships mediated by digital contexts and the social climate of a learning environment? Which kind of relationship?

The work here described have mainly a phenomenological approach, but it's been denoted by an "integrated" perspective which seen a mixed research methodology of both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2015; Greene, 2002, 2008; Johnson, 2014).

The research described in this contribution lasted for four years (from October 2014 till March 2018) and took place in two Italian and two French public secondary schools placed in centered neighborhoods,

but relatively close to the suburbs in order to ensure a balanced social-economical background mix due to the presence of privileged and low-privileged families.

### From the teachers

From the data analysis collected from teachers emerged that ODCs are considered very useful and secure tools for:

- official exchanges with other colleagues, with students and with student's parents: the fact that these digital contexts are provided by schools, and the fact that teacher can monitor all the communications give them more confidence;
- managing the class in terms of keeping track of tasks and materials;
- creating and setting new learning conditions;
- foster student's motivation, by dealing with technologies;
- develop Media and Information Literacy among students.

On the other hand, NoDCs suffer of more mistrust. The reasons of this divide are found within the following elements:

- lack of controllability of these environments;
- NoDCs are perceived as the most relevant source of distraction;
- students are not aware of the risks connected to the use of NoDCs;
- misuses of NoDCs by parents (group chats used to discuss superficially about school's issues, conflicts...)

The issue of teachers' involvement in monitoring involvement in monitoring and managing all the potential problems that may come from digital contexts was one of the most important. Some teachers mentioned a privacy issue and reported that NoDCs are perceived as an element of intrusion into their personal lives. Some teachers indicated they don't want to mix professional with personal life, but on the other

hand some other teachers stated that in any case their involvement is inevitable and key:

"Forbid? No... you can't forbid anything, not anymore... even ourselves are knee-dipped into it! I think that we can, and we have to show to our kids a different way to use technology, more just..." (Italian teacher)

"Well... it's certainly not because we are forbidding it that our kids won't use their smartphones in class. It's not a matter of forbidding, but a matter of sharing rules and mutual trust..." (French teacher)

### From the students

The majority of the students reached by the research personally possess a mobile device (84% first, 93% second, 96% third, 100% fourth school year). Despite concerns of parental control of online practices, most of the students (57% first, 50% second, 69% third, 73% fourth school year) are free from parental vigilance when they are connected to their mobile devices. In this case, 76% of subjects bring their mobiles at school (58% first, 74% second, 86% third and fourth school year) and declared to use it also during breaks, such as when they go to the bathroom and during some lessons. It's interesting that the most popular uses are to interact with others, to entertain themselves and to do other things such as control social media or take pictures or videos.

For what purposes do you use your mobile during schooltime?

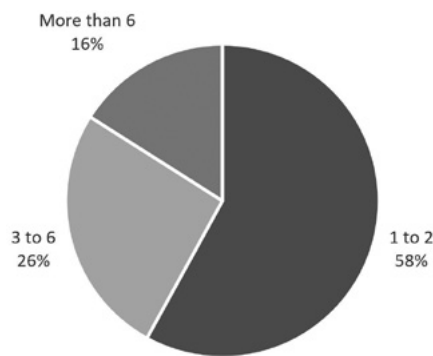
Ask for help during tests	15%
To make jokes	17%
Google something	33%
Take pictures or videos	34%
Control social media updates	50%
To play when I'm bored	60%
To chat with friends	71%

Students consider ODCs as useful tools only for educational purposes work and for those communications with teachers only connected to school. They found this digital contexts very unpractical for the relational exchanges with their peers mainly for the following reasons: this spaces are strictly controlled by

teachers, usually they don't allow group conversations, but only one-to-one exchanges and they are not user friendly in terms of mobile accessibility.

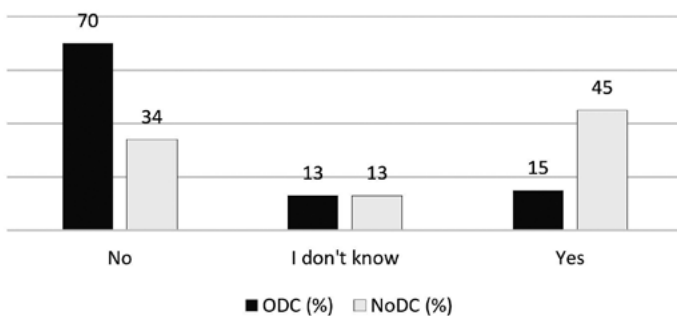
The students indicated in the research that they prefer to use NoDC. They use these spaces seamlessly both from school and from home to interact with their friends, classmates and families. Most frequently mentioned was meeting up with classmates to help each other for homeworks or for in-class tests, or simply to stay in constant contact with friends and classmates when they are home. Another notable aspect is the intense use of groupchats. Each class has at least one or two groupchats simultaneously that are used for exchange jokes, pictures, funny videos, homeworks' hints, but sometimes insults, and controversies.

Number of groupchats per class



Regarding controversies and conflicts, we propose a comparison between two histograms which show that NoDCs are a more fertile terrain for in class conflicts or unpleasant situations than ODCs: the dark column represents the unpleasant in class situations that are related to ODCs' exchanges and the lightened one those related to NoDC.

Are you aware of unpleasant inclass situations related to Digital Contexts' exchanges?



Of particular interest are the answers of those who wrote and talked about which kind of unpleasant situations have actually happened. In ODC these situations are mainly linked to misunderstanding between classmates or workgroups and stolen passwords in NoDC are more related to arguments between individuals and some members of a group chat, misunderstandings coming from jokes, or mocks and insults. Another aspect to underline is the feeling of being cut out from group chats: 45 students declared that they actually feel excluded by these groups and this was hurtful to them.

The processes just described reveal a relationship of mutual influence between classroom everyday life and digital contexts used. In each group interview emerged episodes of in-class conflicts started from digital arguments, and vice versa, and this cannot not have a sort of influence on the LESC.

### Main conclusions

The formal educational contexts—more specifically, secondary schools—have more and more become interconnected environments (online and offline) where students, teachers and families are plunged into a very complex and seamlessly changing intersections between ODCs and NoDCs. A very complex situation to analyze and to regulate that makes the issue of Digital Context Mediated Relational Dynamics one of the priorities among the educational challenges of the next years.

From the data collected emerge a small but quite interesting scenario where secondary schools' students possess and bring their smartphones inside classrooms' walls, where events that occur in digital contexts are not marooned into a "cloud" but have an important influence on classroom's social climate.

In conclusion, presented here are some of the next priorities that formal education system will need to take into account in order to give an answer to the issues described in this contribution. The first one would be including Digital Context Mediated Relational Dynamics into the debate around the Learning Environments' Social Climate. Too often ICTs are considered only in relation with learning and cognitive processes and very few in correlation to social-relational dynamics. Prioritize

teacher training to face these new situations, not with “old rituals” (Meirieu, 2015), but with new ones. Very often the first reaction is to forbid and to build walls, but, as one of the teacher’s interviewed reported, it’s impossible and counter-productive to forbid what it’s impossible to forbid. A good way could be including these dynamics into educational practices and see them not as a problem but as educational opportunities; of course, trainings initiatives won’t have an impact if families are not involved with specific trainings around the topic.

Lastly, it is important to work with students in their mediated real-world environments where all the processes and negotiations are at play. Further, promoting Digital Citizenship Education projects and Media and Information Literacy initiatives is paramount to have future students and citizens aware of the risks and of the opportunities offered by digital technologies. ❖

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# Media Literacy Education in Primary Years: Carrying on Regardless

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## Abstract

This think-piece shares emerging ideas about media education, which the authors permit themselves to explore despite the current 'strangulation' of media studies in England. By 'carrying on regardless' we refer to an aspiration we have to continue to develop our pedagogical and theoretical approaches to media education, rather than having to expend energy always defending the subject and reformulating it to suit the discourses of populist politics. As such we reflect back on the Developing Media Literacy research project and consider our interpretations of the data in the light of recent thinking about cognition, constructivism and curriculum (more Cs!) in learning and pedagogy. We suggest that there is still important work to be done in terms of developing pedagogy which enables complex concepts to be understood, operationalized and questioned by children. We do so with the assumption implicit (as it is in most other subjects) that this work is important for the individual, the community and society (and that we do not need to spend our word count reinventing that particular wheel).

**Key Words: Media literacy, pedagogy, constructivism, cognition, curriculum concepts**

## Introduction

Six years ago, in 2012, a major media literacy project that both authors were involved in (in different capacities) came to an end. Some of the data from this project has been written about (Buckingham, 2014; Burn et al., 2010; Parry, 2014, 2016 ; Powell, 2014) but there was also a lot of data which did not make the final cut. At CEMP's Media Education Summit in Rome in 2016<sup>1</sup>, where we were both presenting, we took the opportunity to discuss this data in the light of emerging issues which we were worrying about; issues that have come to be seen as 'the strangulation of media studies.'<sup>2</sup> Since that time we have created shared opportunities to reflect on the research and what it still might have to tell us about the kind of media literacy learning that had gone on, or was likely to be still going on, in classrooms. While a significant amount of time had elapsed, we found the

data from the primary schools in particular, provided valuable documentation of attempts to teach media studies concepts to young children. We propose that in the “cold climate” in which media literacy education finds itself in England and Northern Ireland today this data has a significant contribution to make. To put it another way, the development of media literacy education and media studies as a subject has hit numerous policy and curriculum road-blocks which are hampering progress. The data we have returned to, speaks to a different context perhaps; an imagined context in which the roadblocks have been overcome and we are looking optimistically, reflectively and critically at the epistemological development of the subject and planning further pedagogical innovation. In the title we frame this as ‘carrying on regardless’ and by this we mean that our energy cannot only be spent on critiquing the way the subject has been subjugated by the current government. We must imagine a future and not be forced into reactionary and defensive positions. In order to look forward we look outwards, rather than backwards and we look at what we perceive to be examples of teaching which signal some opportunities for innovation.

Our discussions have focused largely on the data documenting the teaching of media literacy with young children (6 and 7 year olds). However, as we were discussing the data from the original project and thinking about what it said about pedagogy and practice now, it soon became clear that many other questions were being raised by it which applied to media education work

*We must imagine a future and not be forced into reactionary and defensive positions.*

done with learners at all levels. This article is then, a brief account of the research project, but also an account of the kind of challenges that are posed when reflecting on the data in 2018. Over and above the issue of the policy and curriculum road-blocks, we would group these challenges into three main areas; 1) Pedagogical Challenges; 2) The Problems of Constructivism and the “cognitive turn”; 3) The Conceptual Framework and Social Realist views of Curriculum. An article of this length cannot explore these challenges in

huge depth (and we are planning a longer paper) but we offer a brief analysis in order to elicit debate with colleagues about the data and how it speaks to different contexts— aspiring perhaps also to develop further international solidarity and collective action in relation to the further progression of our subject.

### **The Project Data**

The wider media literacy project from which the original data we looked at, was conceived of as a study of learning progression. In effect, what could be said about progression in media literacy over a sustained period of time—in this case, two years? The project involved teaching four groups of children and young people of different ages four units of work, connected to the conceptual framework of Media Language, Audience, Representation and Institution. Across the two year period, all the learning and production work that these four age groups (6-7 year olds, 9-10 year olds, 12-13 year olds and 15-16 year olds) produced was collected and scrutinised. This data included production work, classroom activities, classroom teaching and interviews with both teachers and pupils. In our first fresh look at the data we decided to focus on the youngest group’s work on the concept of audience. This was primarily because we thought that both as a concept and as an age group, audience and 6-7 year olds sense of it is not something that has been extensively explored in the existing literature but also because in this particular classroom the teacher had tried to build on previous teaching of the other concepts and treated this final activity as an opportunity to make links across each of the previous units.

The Audience unit of work, the last one to be tackled in the project included a brainstorming activity that we hoped would promote the kind of reflexive thinking about the assumptions often made about the relationship between media and audiences. We provided a set of one-sentence statements about audiences that children were encouraged to debate, for example: *Social networking sites like Facebook stop young people making friends, going out and socialising.*

The aim here was to highlight and to question the assumptions on which the statements were based; and to begin to consider what kinds of evidence we might need if we wanted to explore them further, or gather information about them. The second and third activities

used simulation techniques to address the targeting of audiences, and then to give students some experience of audience research. The first was essentially a ‘warm up’ activity, in which students were asked to devise, research and ‘pitch’ a new cartoon to replace *The Simpsons*, with different types of appeal to different members of the family. The second was significantly more elaborate: students were asked to devise a cross-media health campaign designed to prevent the spread of a virulent new form of influenza. Here again, they were asked to research the media preferences, needs and perspectives of a range of different audience groups, and to assess the potential impact of their proposals on their behaviour—in this case including young children and their mothers, and elderly people.

The data available for this unit included a large amount of video recording of the teaching that went on for this age group on one site in the project (there were four sites altogether) and the subsequent learning activities that the children engaged in. We originally intended that reflecting again on this data would allow us to think about the issues surrounding the teaching of a concept such as audience to young children in particular, but as we progressed in our analysis, it became very apparent to us that wider questions were being raised by what we were looking at. With both the benefit of hindsight and one eye on the educational policy environment both here in the UK and globally, we started to think that there was a need to consider these wider questions and challenges and ask them of both ourselves and our fellow media educators.

### 1) Pedagogical Challenges

When watching the video from our chosen part of the project, we were struck by how much was going on, pedagogically in this class of seven year olds, and how little analysis or theorisation of this activity has gone on, particularly in terms of children of this age. One of us had observed, even in his own research (Connolly, 2013) that there was little attempt to theorise media literacy pedagogy in terms of what it is that the media literacy teacher does or should do. Since this time, there have been some developments, most notably Julian McDougall’s notion of the “pedagogy of the inexpert” (Andrews & McDougall, 2012)—wherein the teacher brokers a sort of knowledge exchange with their student based on the students’ experiences

of culture and technology, resulting in learning occurring through an “assemblage-event”. This seems to be a perfectly acceptable way of thinking about pedagogy for older students who have had certain kinds of experience and perspectives on culture and the media, but we had some doubts about whether it was an appropriate model for very young children. In the project data we looked at, there was a great deal of quite subtle teacher guidance; this undoubtedly did involve a conversation—something that is essential to McDougall’s

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model—but it was, perhaps paradoxically, both highly structured and highly agile. Consider this comment made by the teacher as part of a discussion about media audiences which had begun to focus on questions about the suitability of a particular media text for a particular audience, thereby touching on film classification. The discussion had been in process for some time and the children had been drawing on their knowledge of science and experiments to think about how they might investigate media audiences when one child suggests:

Year 3 child: Say if you bought a drink—you’d look at the back and see what ingredients there is.

Teacher: Ah so you are comparing media to a drink. A scientific way of doing it—so you’d see how much fat and sugar was in it to see it was bad for you. Films are more difficult to do that with because they don’t come with a label saying what’s inside them and we don’t know exactly how much violence or swearing.

What struck us about this exchange is the way that the teacher engages in what we term “conceptual oscillation”. The pedagogical skill here, involves taking

what a child suggests and summarising it to the group in the light of deeper conceptual knowledge and experience, whilst also raising questions using concrete examples the children can engage with. So here the teacher adopts a position in relation to the concept and the child's own suggestion but not a closed one and not one that he maintains throughout the unit. Over time he moves from one child, one perspective, one understanding of the concept to the next but he

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inhabits each in the moment through the use of examples. He recognises the different understandings of audience the children have and brings his own knowledge of the concept into dialogue with it and this enables him to create a space in which multiple meanings can be accepted and explored. This seems to us to be something a little different to a pedagogy of the inexpert, and so, something that needs theorising in a different way. It also seems to us to be a stark contrast to some of the more exam-focused lessons we saw where meaning was much more tightly defined and determined by experts including teachers, web resources and text books .

## **2) The Problem of Constructivism and the “Cognitive Turn”**

The role of the teacher in the classroom exchanges we witnessed in the video data led us from the pedagogy itself to the philosophical and epistemological positions which underpinned it. In this particular situation the teacher definitely did some things which we as observers, considered “expert”, skilfully leading pupils from their own experiences to deeper conceptual understanding. Such considerations pushed us back towards the idea that constructivism is essential for media education. Knowledge was being actively constructed all the time; some of this construction was the students using the teacher's expertise and applying it to new learning situations (as in the class discussion)

, while in other situations the students used their existing experiences to test out the teacher expertise (in the simulation task for example). This observation may seem obvious, but it is, we believe important to emphasise the constructivist nature of media literacy because more broadly in education, we perceive what Connolly (forthcoming 2018) has termed “the cognitive turn”—in essence the desire to create accounts of learning which focus on the role of mind, memory and perception. In England and Northern Ireland's compulsory education system there has been a return to an emphasis on knowledge-based curricula and in this policy and curriculum context knowledge is seen as a set of finite, learnable and predictable facts.

In Media Studies the focus on sociological concepts such as institutions and representation and the emphasis on criticality means we tend to see knowledge as constructed, contested and contingent. Indeed in this classroom, there was little doubt in our minds that the vast amount of knowledge was being socially constructed. However, we also saw an important role for a pedagogic context in which conceptual understanding could move from being tentative or, in Vygotskian terms, ‘intuitive’ to being ‘scientific’ or learned. Not as a means of closing things down and especially not for the purposes of assessment but much more for the purposes of operationalising concepts, acting on them as part of research and creative activity. So in this case the children used the idea of a target audience to think about how they might communicate an important health message effectively. We suggest this is compatible with the teacher's oscillation between this understanding of audience and another and also connects with Connolly's metaphor of the “dialectic of familiarity” (2013, 2014) . Here the children inhabit a particular conceptual understanding through creative production activity. However, we argue that there may be a stronger place for a more cognitive variety of constructivism in which things like memory and perception are used and developed by both teacher and pupils through certain kinds of classroom interaction. One of us has already suggested for example, (Connolly, forthcoming 2018) that memory has some role to play in learning a production process such as video editing. While we are not wholly acceptant of some cognitive accounts of teaching and learning and their application to media education, we

find ourselves in the middle of a global education discourse (Willingham 2017; Sweller 2016; Wiliam 2017) which asks teachers to think about the role of the brain in what they are teaching and what is being learnt. Media educators must have some response to this, even if it is just to reassert our commitment to media literacy as a socially constructivist activity. Undertaking further analysis using Vygotskian accounts of conceptual learning, as proposed by David Buckingham (2003) and Parry (2014) may be important for us as a community to ensure we are responsive in our pedagogy to new understanding of learning.

### 3) The Conceptual Framework and Social Realist Views of Curriculum

Stuart Poyntz (2015) has given a very good recent account of why we need a conceptual framework, and we would broadly agree with his defence of its strengths in the face of new models of media education. Poyntz identifies five issues or challenges which are important to consider when thinking about the significance of a key concept model, which can broadly summarised as 1) A return to traditional views of education; 2) A paucity of teacher education in the field of media education; 3) A focus on what Poyntz calls “performative” vocabularies, best characterised by the connection of education to the acquisition of “competencies”; 4) The challenge of connectivity and how a key concept model deals with this ; and 5) The vexed relationship of a key concept model to a wider, global media and information literacy agenda.

Putting aside for one moment, that in many jurisdictions, including England and NI, that point 1) on the above list has almost already entirely done away with point 3), these challenges are still present. Indeed for us, one of our most salient observations when looking back at the data from this project was how point 1) has meant that we would probably not be able to facilitate this sort of project now, in 2018 , only a few short years away from its completion. Theoretically, this return to traditional modes of education, in which there are “hard borders” between school subjects, and very specifically defined sorts of knowledge which occupy them, is suggested by a group of sociologists of education (Moore,

2000; Maton, 2010) who define themselves as social realists. This group of thinkers see interdisciplinarity as a weakness (Moore, 2000), and canons of texts as essential for defining what is important to know or even worth knowing (Maton; 2010). Many academics in media education and broader media literacy have seen the strength of the field as being constituted by its interdisciplinarity and its rejection of cultural hierarchies. For us as researchers, the data in this project reminded us of two things; firstly, that working with young children does require the kind of metalanguage conferred by a key conceptual framework. The teacher we observed working with these 6-7 year olds used it regularly to reinforce learning;

- You’ve definitely got a narrative structure because something is going wrong and it gets fixed at the end”
- “What we’ve got in the class today are two different audiences—and although you might watch the same things, you might also watch different things and you might also have different opinions on things.”

We suggest that this data demonstrates the teacher’s use of critical vocabularies as a fundamental aspect of children’s conceptual learning (Connolly, 2013) and that being taught this vocabulary is an important stage in media learning. However, it is clearly not the sole arbiter of developing media literacy, so secondly, we suggest that, in in the key concept model , there comes a point at which the dynamic between pupil and teacher clearly changes. This might be characterised by McDougall’s “pedagogy of the inexpert” or again, by Connolly’s “dialectic of familiarity” (2013; 2014) , but it clearly does not fit the social realist account of

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learning, and as such needs to be restated to emphasise the strengths of a key concept model which does not rely upon tightly defined canons, vocabularies and subject knowledge.

Much of what we have been thinking about has been about the nature of knowledge and its social construction. In the spirit of this endeavour we would welcome responses from colleagues which will help us think about the issues we have raised in a broader, internationally informed way. In the meantime, we will be carrying on regardless in our reengagement with the data from this class and with our thinking and asking questions about pedagogic practice in our field, the continued value of a conceptual framework and our responses to the cognitive turn in education. ✨

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cemp.ac.uk/summit/2016/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://davidbuckingham.net/2017/07/16/the-strangulation-of-media-studies/>

# An Analysis of Media Literacy Messages in Popular Children's Television

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## Abstract

It is well documented that most children consume over four hours of screen media each day (Common Sense Census, 2015). The majority of this time is spent watching traditional television, on a television set in the home. This television consumption statistic has remained relatively consistent over the past five years, even though children have access to numerous forms of digital media via computer and mobile devices. Children's options for media consumption may extend far beyond traditional television, but their habits are still routed in television. Additionally, their habits remain routed in the two brands that have been the most popular children's media brands for decades:

Nickelodeon and Disney. Through these networks, messages about media creation, media literacy and many related topics (i.e. gender representation) are conveyed. Since children watch programs and episodes on these networks over and over, the messages are conveyed with repetition. What are the messages children are receiving about the role of media in their lives and their relationship and responsibility with media through their television viewing on these popular networks?

This research study analyzed the integration of media literacy concepts in current popular children's television in the USA focusing on four highly-rated television programs from Nickelodeon and Disney Channel: *Game Shakers* (Nickelodeon), *The Loud House* (Nickelodeon), *Bizaarvark* (Disney Channel)

and *Stuck in the Middle* (Disney Channel). Episodes were coded along four key definers of media literacy according to the definition of media literacy from the National Association for Media Literacy Education: access, analyze, evaluate, create. The study assesses the opportunity for increasing media literacy messages, while recognizing that the primary goal of the content is entertainment.

**Keywords:** Nickelodeon, Disney, children, children's media, media literacy

It is well documented that most children in the United States consume at least four hours of screen media each day<sup>1</sup>. This habitual media consumption influences a child's understanding of the major components of their life, including reflections on their home, their family, their friends, their school, their community, even their country. The messages children receive through media can be understood as "value messages" woven into the character's personalities, storylines and dialogue of the programs they consume. These messages are highly influential due to the amount of time children spend with media and their habit of repetitive consumption. In addition to value messages about gender, race, consumerism, nutrition, and numerous other topics, one can find value messages about media. Media content contains value messages about *how* media should be consumed, *when*

it should be consumed, the content to consume, with *whom*, how *often*, and using which specific *devices*. These messages inform a child's first thoughts of what it means to be media literate.

Media literacy is defined by the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication"<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, media literacy is not a required course or topic in US education, and therefore its' inclusion in formal education is inconsistent and often non-existent. Contrast that with a child's media consumption, which is both consistent and existent. Therefore, the place a child is most likely to receive messaging about media is from the media itself.

The purpose of this research study was to analyze the integration of media messages and media literacy concepts in children's television. The study focused on four highly-rated television programs from popular children's networks: *Game Shakers* (Nickelodeon), *The Loud House* (Nickelodeon), *Bizaarvark* (Disney Channel) and *Stuck in the Middle* (Disney Channel).

## Methodology

The study coded media literacy messages found within these programs according to the four key definers of media literacy articulated in the NAMLE definition: access, analyze, evaluate, create. Occurrences of each term were counted and analyzed. To ensure that all occurrences relied on the same meaning, definitions from the Oxford English Dictionary<sup>4</sup> were used. Additionally, a list of examples was drafted in advance to serve as a guide during the screening of each episode. A partial definition for each term is provided in diagrams 1 through 4.

Note: if a character in an episode used media to *passively* consume, the moment was coded as "access". If the character used media to analyze, evaluate or create, it was coded for that category, even though the character would also need to "access" that particular media at the same time.

### Diagram 1

#### Access:

Focus is on availability and consumption; "the right or opportunity to use or benefit from something".

#### Examples:

Media or technology seen within the frame, but not in use

Media or technology seen within the frame and in use

Character using media or technology, without reflective commentary

### Diagram 2

#### Analyze:

Focus is on seeking meaning. "to examine (something) methodically and in detail, typically in order to explain and interpret it".

#### Examples:

Reflection about media use made by a character using the media or technology

Reflection about media use made by a character watching someone else use media or technology

Reflection on the name of the media or technology, terminology, or related jargon

### Diagram 3

#### Evaluate:

Focus is on assessing value. "to form an idea of the amount, number, or value of...".

#### Examples:

Dialogue or action in which a character makes a judgment about their media use

Dialogue or action in which a character makes a judgment about someone else's media use

### Diagram 4

#### Create:

Focus is on new and original, to "bring something into existence".

#### Examples:

Character creating a video. Character creating an app.

Character taking a photo.

Character uploading content online.



## Overview of selected television series

Twenty episodes were screened for this study over two months in 2017: five episodes from each of the selected series.

### Game Shakers<sup>5</sup>

This series centers on two seventh-grade girls, Babe and Kenzie, and their video game company, Game Shakers. The (fictitious) rap superstar Double G is their business partner. Double G's son, Triple G, is a game consultant that works for the girls. Their friend Hudson is their main game tester. Many scenes take place in the Game Shakers office. A unique element of the series is that viewers may download the games created as part of specific plotlines, through the Nickelodeon app. Game Shakers premiered on Nickelodeon September 2015.

### The Loud House<sup>6</sup>

This series centers on the day-to-day life of Lincoln Loud, a middle child in a family of eleven children, all of whom (other than Lincoln) are female. Throughout the series, Lincoln navigates the challenges, accidents, involvement, and love of his ten sisters; Lori (age 17), Leni (16), Luna (15), Luan (14), Lynn (13), Lucy (8), Lana and Lola (identical twins, 6), Lisa (4), and Lily (15 months). The Loud House premiered on Nickelodeon May 2016.

### Bizaarvark<sup>7</sup>

This series centers on two thirteen-year-old girls, Paige and Frankie, who create humorous videos for their online comedy channel on Vuuugle, a video streaming website similar to YouTube. Episodes follow the girls on their quest to become popular Internet celebrities. The main location for the series is the Vuuugle Studios, a production center in which many Vuuugle stars produce their video content, including Dirk Mann, star of the online channel *Dare Me Bro*, and Amelia Duckworth, star of the online channel *Perfect*

*Perfection with Amelia*. Paige and Frankie's long-time friend Bernie Schotz serves as their agent. The opening song for the series concludes with the lyric "Let's go make some videos!". Bizaarvark premiered on Disney Channel June 2016.

### Stuck in the middle<sup>8</sup>

This series centers on Harley, the middle child of the

Diaz family. Harley is a budding inventor. Her six siblings, Rachel (age 17), Georgie (16), Ethan (14), Harley (13), Lewie and Beast (10 year old twins), and Daphne (11) often rely on her technical knowledge and creativity to solve their problems or help them out. Episodes explore the typical day-to-day challenges and activities of a large family. Other main characters include Harley's best friend Ellie and Harley's parents, Suzy and Tom. *Stuck in the Middle* premiered on Disney Channel February 2016.

## Evaluation of media literacy messages

Combining all coded moments from all four key terms and all twenty episodes reveals a total of 196 media literacy moments.

The media literacy category reflected most often was "access". This category was reflected 68 times in action and dialogue. In descending order, the next highest-ranking category was "create", with 55 moments, then "evaluate" with 42 moments and "analyze" with 31 moments. Note that this descending order was not the same within each series.

The descending order for Game Shakers was access (23 moments), create (22), evaluate (13) and analyze (9), for a total of 67 media literacy moments.

The descending order for The Loud House was access (32 moments), create (15), evaluate (10) and analyze (4), for a total of 61 media literacy moments.

The descending order for Bizaarvarks was evaluate (17 moments), analyze (14), create (12), access (4), for a total of 47 media literacy moments.

The descending order for Stuck in the Middle was access (9 moments), create (6), analyze, (4) evaluate (2), for a total of 21 media literacy moments.

Even in the two cases where the descending order for an individual series matched the descending order of the four series together (as it was for Game Shakers and The Loud House) there is a notable difference in percentage allocations. For example, the 55 moments of "create" for the series assessed together represents 28% of the total number of media literacy moments (196). But in Game Shakers the 22 moments of "create" represents 33% of the total number of media literacy moments (67). This shows that Game Shakers has a higher percentage of moments reflecting "create" than the four series together.

The series with the greatest number of "access"

moments was *The Loud House* (32).

The series with the greatest number of “analyze” moments was *Bizaarvark* (14).

The series with the greatest number of “evaluate” moments was *Bizaarvark* (17).

The series with the greatest number of “create” moments was *Game Shakers* (22).

It is worth noting precisely how these media literacy moments were conveyed since the moments in some episodes were fairly brief and simplistic, while others showed a deeper level of personal reflection from a character or a more complex and nuanced use of media. Below are examples from each category.

### Access

*Game Shakers*—examples include; a drone being operated by a character trying to get to an out-of-reach billboard (S2/E209)<sup>9</sup>, two adults playing a video game with Babe and Kenzie on tablets (S2/E19), Kenzie checking the time on her mobile phone (S2/E19).

*The Loud House*—examples include; Lori using a flash drive to store her new yearbook photo (S2/E14), Ronnie Anne reading a book (S2/E13), the family gathering in the living room to watch the television show, “Dreamboat”, a fake reality show (S2/E13).

*Stuck in the middle*—examples include; Mom using her mobile phone to leave a message for Rachel (S2/E10), Dad saying, “I’ll check the security camera from the store,” then looking at the video stream on his phone from a security camera (S2/E10), Daphne luring her brothers into her tent with downloaded episodes of *Dumpster Jack* (S2/E9).

### Analyze

*The Loud House*—examples include: Lincoln saying “All we gotta do is copy these handsome dudes, grab a photo from the yearbook file and paste ‘em here.” (S2/E14), Lincoln playing a handheld video game, then hitting “pause” and the word “pause” coming up on the video game screen (S2/E6).

*Bizaarvark*—examples include: Amelia saying “In your space is live-streaming and the WIFI in my house is down. Do you guys have Internet?” (S1/E20), Frankie saying “You missed out yesterday. Your mom

hired the camera crew for a full day, so I shot a bunch of footage in the pancake costume. I came up with a character and developed a full back story” (S1/E18).

*Stuck in the middle*—examples include: Mom and Harley watching a commercial about visiting the elderly and Mom saying “Those old people need us. We should be helping too.” Then, they volunteer (S2/E11), Harley watching a commercial for a boarding school and thinking about her best friend Ellie going to the school (S2/E10).

### Evaluate

*Game Shakers*—examples include: Everyone wanting to take selfies with a meatball because Michael Strahan (former football star) was in the restaurant earlier and choked on a meatball (S2/E6), Trip saying “Our fans like watching him, and that means we sell more games!” (S2/E15), Babe saying “Yesterday when people were watching Hudson our numbers jumped from 200,000 to 400,000-- so all those people are gonna see him wearing a Game Shakers t-shirt and that’s gonna help us promote our games.” (S2/E15), Hudson saying “Not everybody loves your new album. I’m looking online at comments from people and some of them aren’t so nice.” (S2/E12).

*The Loud House*—examples include: Lincoln saying that by putting his face and Clyde’s face in all those group photos they can be assured they won’t be forgotten, “Our immortality rests on this flash drive!” (S2/E14), Lori talking about being devastated if her bad photo makes it into the yearbook (S2/E14), Bobby saying “You listened to amagazine instead of following your own instincts?” (S2/E9), Clyde saying “Time for the 20/20 rule. For every 20 minutes looking at screens, you should look away for 20 seconds” (S2/E6).

*Bizaarvark*—examples include: Victor saying “Teddy, we talked about you not paying attention to me (because of obsessive use of his mobile device). I’ll make you a deal. If you can tell me the details of my evil plan, I will double your phone’s data plan.” (S1/E20), Paige and Frankie asking, “You created an entire show just to breakup our friendship? Hired actors? Created a fake network? All to bring down two teenage girls who still haven’t cracked 20,000 subscribers?” (S1/E20),

Dirk saying “I’m such a dope. Always record in landscape. It’s more cinematic that way.” (S1/E18), Dirk saying, “I’m taking an off-the-grid vacation this weekend. No calls. No texts. Just me in a cabin writing haikus.” (S1/E18), Paige saying “I love this virtual snow. It’s just like playing in real snow but without any of the actual life experience.” (S1/E17).

### Create

*Game Shakers*—examples include: a crowd of people taking out their phones and video recording the meltdown of Double G (S2/E20), Kenzie working on coding & hacking into a video billboard (S2/E19), Babe saying “Trip, get this test on video, ok?” Then Trip takes out his mobile phone, says “rolling” and starts recording (S2/E6), Babe puts a “yo-pro” harness and camera on Hudson so they can “live stream” him all day (S2/E15).

*Bizaarvark*—examples include: Victor saying “This entire web series was created by me!” (S1/E20), Paige and Frankie write a song and make a music video about getting sweaty in gym class for their Vuuugle channel (S1/E18), Dirk is stuck under a pile of stuff and records and uploads videos to his web channel, “Dare me bro” (S1/E18), Bernie tries to create different videos to figure out his brand (S1/E17).

*Stuck in the middle*—examples include: Harley imagining how she would convert the family activity board into a digital, high tech interface (S2/E11), Brothers camping in the backyard, playing sound effects through their mobile device to annoy their sister and make her go inside. i.e. burping (S2/E9), Harley remembering she posted a bad review online of a department of motor vehicles employee who failed her sister in her driving test and finds out his boss fired him for the bad review. Later in the episode, there’s a flashback of her sitting on a couch using her Dad’s laptop typing the bad review (S2/E4).

### Conclusion

The coding analysis from this study revealed that each of the four coded series reflect inclusion of some media literacy messages, however, the messages vary greatly in frequency and in the complexity and depth of the message. For this reason, the messages often fall

short of truly building media literacy skills. Acknowledging that building media literacy skills is not the goal of any of these programs, enhancing these media literacy moments would serve an entertainment goal as well. Children’s attraction to media extends to many of the messages inherent in a media literacy conversation such as how media is made, by whom, for what audience, how much it costs, how it can influence others, etc. Within the goal of entertainment, there are numerous ways characters could be shown modeling decision-making about media, evaluating content, and reflecting on their own media use.

Children’s media content will likely continue to use children’s proven interest in media as a storyline because it has been and continues to be a successful model. From 2006-2011 the Disney Channel series *Hannah Montana*<sup>10</sup> took kids into the fictional behind-the-scenes world of a pop star revealing the media construction of celebrity and marketing. From 2007-2012 Nickelodeon introduced kids to *iCarly*<sup>11</sup>, a series about three middle school friends who produce an online TV show revealing the kinds of challenges faced by producers. In these shows, and in the four television series analyzed in this study, media literacy messages have enhanced the entertainment value, while integrating media literacy information. There is a tremendous opportunity to increase those messages recognizing the enjoyment and influence of media in children’s lives. ✱

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Common Sense Media, 2015

<sup>4</sup> Oxford English Dictionary online. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nick.com/game-shakers/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nick.com/loud-house/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://disneychannel.disney.com/bizaarvark>

<sup>8</sup> <http://disneychannel.disney.com/stuck-in-the-middle>

<sup>9</sup> The parentheses after each example, represents the season and episode in which the example aired. For example, “(S2/E19)” means the example aired during season 2, episode 19.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0493093/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0972534/>

# Media literacy—definitions and methods

## Analysis of media literacy in Bulgaria

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### Abstract

This article is about the main aspects of media literacy. The most popular definitions and concepts for media literacy are shown in this research. There is an examination of the most useful methods for media literacy which are implemented in the society. The research includes core concepts, tools and questions for recognizing and analyzing media literacy in the modern community. Also this study is focused on the usage of media literacy in Bulgaria among the most vulnerable groups of people and how this concept is developed and perceived in my home country. This is how a relatively complete picture of trends and perceptions has been shown.

**Keywords:** Media literacy, definitions, tools, methods for media literacy, media literacy in Bulgaria, analysis

### Introduction

In the last few years media literacy has become a very important topic in the global community. Many experts in the field of media communications have focused their researches on the development of media literacy. They examine how media literacy has changed as a concept and what the most popular methods for media literacy are. The object of this article is the media literacy as a contemporary concept of education in the Bulgarian community.

That is why this research is based on the groundbreaking studies of popular scientists and experts in this field. The purpose is to show the most popular definitions of media literacy, to represent the tools for its implementation and to evaluate how this concept is put into practice in my home country - Bulgaria. In addition to that, the study is focused on people's perceptions about media literacy in Bulgaria and what kind of educational programs are established in order to disseminate this notion among the most vulnerable groups. The main objectives of this study are to confirm the important role of media literacy in the Bulgarian society and to show all significant aspects, related to this concept.

### 1. Definitions of media literacy

Media literacy was established as a concept more than 30 years ago, but well-accepted definition still does not exist. If we focus on the literal meaning of this expression, we can share the following opinion: “When people think of the term “literacy,” what generally springs to mind is reading and writing, speaking and listening...But because today people use so many different types of expression...the concept of literacy is beginning to be defined as the ability to share meaning through symbol systems in order to fully participate in society.” (Hobbs 2010: 14). Nowadays we have to focus not only on the basic literacy (reading and writing), but also on media literacy. There is a growing need to develop and implement unambiguous con-

cept for this notion, which can be studied by children. Professor Jose Manuel Perez Tornero tries to do that. He explains media literacy as "...the term used to describe the skills and abilities required for conscious, independent development in the new communication environment—digital, global, and multimedia—of the information society." (Tornero 2008:103). Media literacy is important, because there is a high rate of media consumption and people have to learn to distinguish different information. At the same time media enforces its positions on the modern global market and it continues to play a major role in shaping people's perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. That is why media literacy is important as a tool, which provides life-long learning and better orientation in the contemporary media and online environment (Jolls & Thoman 2005:9). This concept of media literacy is supported by the president of the American Center for Media Literacy, Tessa Jolls, and one of the founders of media literacy as a notion—Len Masterman.

In Masterman's books, "Teaching about television" (1980) and "Teaching the media" (1985), he presents the main principles of media literacy. According to him: "I suppose the big step forward was to recognize a truism: that what we were actually studying was television and not its subject contents. That is, we were not actually studying sport or music or news or documentary... We were studying the ways in which these subjects were being represented and symbolized and packaged by the medium..." (Masterman 2010). The way how we understand media content is the key concept for media literacy in Masterman's research. Media literacy is described as an innovative form of science, which teaches the community how to interpret media content from different media channels. Another popular definition of media literacy is provided by the Aspen Media Literacy Leadership Institute in 1992. According to it media literacy is a new approach to education, which provides a framework for access, analysis, evaluation and creation of the message in variety of forms (Aspen Media Literacy Leadership Institute 1992). This concept is based on the understanding of media and it requires special skills for inquiry and self-expression. At the same time we have to focus on different tools for recognizing and evaluating media literacy, in order to show relatively complete picture of this concept.

## 2. Tools for media literacy

The tools for media literacy are the most important step for the implementation of this concept in the community. They consist of core concepts and questions, which have to be addressed in order to put into practice media literacy. According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education, which is connected with the American Center for Media Literacy, there are 5 main principles for media literacy, namely: "All media messages are constructed. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules. Different people experience the same media messages differently. Media have embedded values and points of view. Most media messages are organized for profit and/or power." (Jolls 2012:31). These principles have been found as tools for recognizing, analyzing and evaluating media content. But they also lead to five major questions. These questions are used to reinforce media literacy as a concept and to use it against media manipulation. The president of the American Center for Media Literacy—Tessa Jolls and the founder of the Center, Elizabeth Thoman, use these questions in the following way: "Who created this message? What techniques are used to attract my attention? How might different people understand this message differently from me? What lifestyles, values and points of views are represented in, or omitted from, this message? Why was this message sent?" (Jolls & Thoman 2005:15). These questions create so called empowerment spiral. This spiral increases the awareness of public about media literacy, provokes critical thinking for media content and shows the ability to make wise judgment for all kind of media productions. Empowerment spiral requires awareness, analysis, reflection and action.

In the first step—awareness—participants start to observe the media and to ask questions. Awareness provides a spiral of critical inquiries, which leads to analysis. This quality helps to go deeper in the field of media literacy and to identify what kind of methods media use in order to attract attention from the audience. The third step from the empowerment spiral is the reflection. In this phase participants start to ask questions "What is the purpose of this content?", "What do we have to think?" and they make examinations of the media. The final step of the spiral is action. It provides opportunity for participants to create con-

structive action ideas and to learn them individually or collectively. These are the most important steps from the empowerment spiral, which were shown in order to prove the fact that media literacy can be easily identified. Acquiring this theoretical base, the article examines the implementation of this notion in Bulgaria.

### 3. Media literacy in Bulgaria

Media literacy is a relatively new concept in Bulgaria. The reason for that is the small Bulgarian media market and its relation with various business and political interests. In the last few years a consistent fight has been observed for the creation and development of independent media. Media literacy has been recognized by people as the only way to resist against media manipulation. Teodora Petrova, dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication and expert in the field of digital communications, presented Bulgarian interpretation of media literacy in the following way: "...an opportunity for access and ability to analyze and evaluate images, sounds and messages, received daily from people by media..." (Petrova 2012:66). A lot of people in Bulgaria are still learning how to remain independent in the environment of aggressive media surrounding. According to one of the most popular Bulgarian media experts, Marin Lesenski, there are specific prerequisites for developing media literacy in Bulgaria. These preconditions are: "...the quality of education, the conditions of the media,

the level of trust in the society and the usage of new forms of participation..." (Lesenski 2017). All these qualities should exist in order to achieve an acceptable level of media literacy and to improve the Bulgarian educational system. But what are the most important trends in the Bulgarian educational system?

According to the last survey of Bulgarian students from the Program for International Student Assessment—PISA: "Bulgarian students take the last position for media literacy among other EU countries. 41% don't have the ability to understand a text and they admit to be media illiterate. This means they can read, but they don't understand the meaning of the text..." (Iordanova 2016) (Fig. 1). These results are shocking in a country, where internet coverage has reached even distant and rural areas and children start using smart phones and computers at a very early age. That is why in the last few years some companies, schools and universities focus on the need for media literacy. They understand that they have to develop strategies, which can increase the level of media literacy in the society.

Since Bulgaria became a member of the European Union in 2007, many companies in the area of digital communications have invested funds in projects evaluating the role of modern technologies. These projects described media literacy as an important feature of the global media environment. That is why

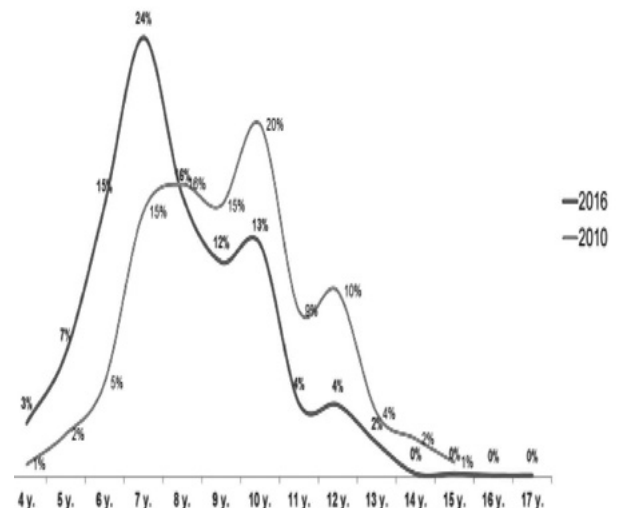
Fig. 1

Results of the survey of Bulgarian students from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA),

Media Literacy	2010	2013	2016
Index	407	403	398

Fig. 2

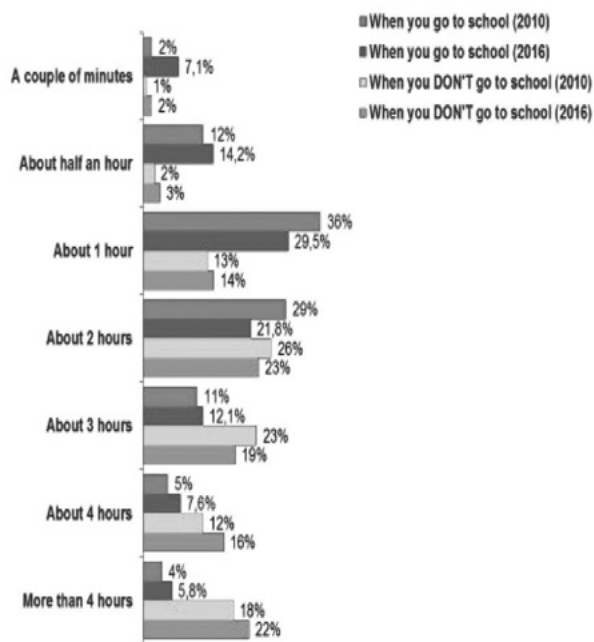
Results from the survey "Are Digital Natives Digitally Literate?" Question: "How old were you when you first used the internet?"



some non government organizations provide research among different groups of people and they try to increase the awareness about media literacy in the society. One of these surveys is “Are Digital Natives Digitally Literate?”, which was published in 2017. It was organized by Safenet—a Bulgarian non government organization for internet safety and was focused on the online experience of Bulgarian children in 2016. According to the results from the research: “...the average age when Bulgarian children start to use the internet has dropped from 9 years in 2010 to 8 years of age in 2016...” (Apostolov, Georgiev, Hajdinjak, Kanchev 2017) (Fig. 2). This survey also shows that many children start using internet more frequently than they did in the past: “The percentage of kids using the internet every day has jumped from 83% in 2010 to about 93% in 2016.” (Apostolov, Georgiev, Hajdinjak, Kanchev 2017) (Fig. 3). This trend is very disturbing, because it shows that children don’t have other interests in their free time. According to the survey another disturbing thing is the lack of sufficient parental control on the internet usage. Parents don’t have resources to restrict the internet access and there are even some shocking cases, in which children become victims of internet influence. These trends were

Fig. 3

Results from the survey “Are Digital Natives Digitally Literate?”  
Question: “How many hours do you spend on the internet when ...?”

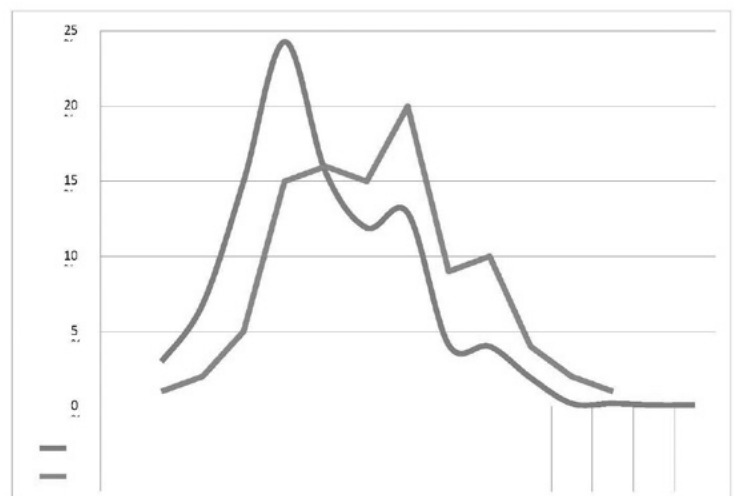


confirmed in another survey about children’s online experience in 2016.

According to the UNESCO research: “...almost all (97%) Bulgarian children aged 9-17 are using internet... The age at which children get online access is steadily decreasing, with some children starting at age of 4 (3% of them) or 5 (6% of them).” (Apostolov, Georgiev, Hajdinjak, Kanchev 2017) (Fig. 4). The survey also shows that Bulgarian children are incapable using core concepts to protect themselves from harmful online content. Another proof to this is the research about online behavior of Bulgarian children, which was published in 2017. The results from it shows that “...over 70% of Bulgarian kids have had a disturbing experience in the online environment (Online behavior of children in Bulgaria 2017) (Fig. 5). This disturbing experience includes improper communication with strangers, becoming a victim of online insults, sending or receiving messages with inappropriate content (so called sexting) and being confused in the online environment. The research shows that Bulgarian children are at risk in the online environment and

Fig. 4

Results from the survey “Online Experience of Children in Bulgaria: Risks and Safety.” Children’s first internet use.



	Age	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
2016		3%	7%	15%	24%	16%	12%	13%	4%	4%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2010		1%	2%	5%	15%	16%	15%	20%	9%	10%	4%	2%	1%		

they need to gain additional knowledge of protecting themselves. These results are very disturbing and local organizations for internet safety try to take measures.

At the beginning of the school year in 2017 some non government organizations and national coalitions decided to start civil campaign aimed to improve the level of media literacy in the Bulgarian elementary schools. 11 non government organizations in the field of education and media are to combine the efforts in the framework of new civil coalition, which purpose is development of media literacy within Bulgarian children. Association of European Journalists—Bulgaria and The Bulgarian Safer Internet Center are among these organizations as well as many others. The purpose of the coalition is not only to encourage a public debate about this topic, but also to show good examples of schools, teachers, educational institutions, organizations and media companies willing to build basic skills among children from the elementary school to work with information and media. This initiative proves that people in Bulgaria have realized that media literacy is an important concept and they want to develop skills in this field. That is why media literacy will become more popular in the Bulgarian community and is going to be one of the most important educational programs in the future.

## Conclusion

To sum up, during the process of examination of media literacy I have reached some conclusions. The first one is that there should be an unambiguous definition for media literacy. Media literacy was established as a concept more than 30 years ago and during this period of time it has changed. Contemporary researchers have to establish a well-accepted definition for it. The second conclusion is that media literacy can be implemented only if we use specific tools. Media literacy provides core concepts and key questions, which are perceived as tools. People use them to put into practice media literacy in the daily life. The last conclusion is that Bulgarian community has to develop media literacy in educational programs at schools and universities. According to the latest research in Bulgaria, children need to learn new skills how to protect themselves in the online environment and they have to be aware of the core principles of media literacy. Only in this way they would be able to survive in the contem-

porary media environment. If we increase our level of media literacy, we will understand better how contemporary media works and we will be able to fight against manipulation. I hope that one day this will happen in the Bulgarian community. ❄

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# Towards infrastructure literacy in media education

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## Abstract

This paper suggests that a broadening of MIL to include what Lisa Parks (2010) call *infrastructure literacy*—a close understanding of the material and infrastructural conditions of our current media landscape—is necessary in order for citizens to develop the critical skills needed to navigate and participate in the contemporary media society, as well as to shape the world of tomorrow. By exploring digitalization policy and K-12 curricula for Sweden, the paper shows that the field is currently dominated by an understanding of media as content or tools for communication, and of the future as predetermined by technology. It also shows a lack of critical perspectives when it comes to media used within education.

**Keywords:** media infrastructures, infrastructure literacy, policy, educational technology

One of the key arguments for promoting media and information literacy (MIL) is the increased information flow following contemporary digitalization processes. Combined with a culture of mistrust, where experience is valued over expertise, the ability to access, analyze, value and produce media content is more important than ever (Hobbs, 2017). It is also argued that we have to look beyond the formal learning taking place in schools and recognize the learning processes taking place online, or through other kinds of media practices (Erstad, 2013). These are all important and valid arguments, but what is often overlooked in the discussion is that schools are

also undergoing profound processes of digitalization that needs to be critically examined in the same way as other media words. In addition, media—both inside and outside schools—are often understood as either content or tools, rather than as environments.

In this paper, based on analyses of Swedish media education and digitalization policies, I point to a lack of material perspectives in the discourse on media in education that recognizes the ubiquitous and structuring qualities of media, and that pays critical attention to the growing field educational technology. The article intends to contribute to an ongoing discussion about the need for a “material turn” in media education (c.f. Friesen & Hug, 2009; Pöttsch, 2016) by suggesting an expansion of the field with what Lisa Parks (2010) call *infrastructure literacy*.

## What is infrastructure literacy?

Media studies have traditionally been dominated by studies on media content, media production or media reception. In recent years, however, a range of material perspectives on media have emerged, such as the growing field of critical media infrastructure studies. Media infrastructures are defined by Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski (2015, p. 4) as “situated sociotechnical systems that are designed and configured to support the distribution of audiovisual signal traffic”, in other words, the technologies, systems, practices and standards that underpin our contemporary media society. The term “sociotechnical” stress that infrastructures are relational rather than “a thing stripped of use” (Star & Ruhleder, 1996, p. 113), drawing on

Susan Leigh Star's and Karen Ruhleder's (ibid.) often cited description of infrastructures as:

- built on old structures and systems
- linked to certain practices and something you learn as member of a community
- invisible when established and working, but visible when first introduced or in case of malfunction

Following the above characteristics shows that educational technologies are something more profound than just a set of tools. They build on established systems and standards such as grades and subjects. They also draw on metaphors from older systems, visible in terms such as “the digital classroom” or “e-books”. Further, these systems are something you learn through professional practice, and that becomes part of what it means to be a teacher or a student in the digitalized school. When first introduced, digital systems might cause some resistance but after a while they seem to sink into the background like all other practices that we take for granted, such as browsing through the news or looking up the nearest restaurant on our smartphones. This taken-for-grantedness is exposed only when the systems cease to work, such as when the internet connection fails or during a power break.

*Sweden is currently undergoing a process of school digitalization, most notably through the revision of the national curricula to promote digital competence of teachers and pupils, performed by the Swedish National Agency for Education, on behalf of the Swedish government.<sup>1</sup>*

The invisibility of well-functioning or established infrastructures is one of the most recurring and discussed topics in infrastructure studies. As put by Bowker and Star (1999, p. 33): “Information infrastructure is a tricky thing to analyse. Good, usable systems disappear almost by definition. The easier they are to use, the harder they are to see.” But when media infrastructures become such an embedded part of our lived environments that they fade into the

background, they also become harder to critique. The strive to conceal infrastructures, even for aesthetic reasons or convenience, is thus not an innocent practice as described by Lisa Parks (2010 np.) in an article about the practice of disguising cell towers as trees:

By disguising infrastructure as part of the natural environment, concealment strategies keep citizens naive and uninformed about the network technologies they subsidize and use each day. We describe ourselves as a “networked society” and yet most members of the public know very little about the infrastructures that support such a designation /.../ This issue of *infrastructure literacy* [emphasis added] becomes more prescient as we enter an era of ubiquitous computing in which many different kinds of objects and surfaces will be used either as relay towers and/or web interfaces.

Infrastructure literacy is thus about visualizing infrastructures in order to facilitate civic participation in debates about network ownership, development, and access. But it might also mean actual infrastructuring, as suggested by Shannon Mattern (2016, p. 6) who means that through understanding how media infrastructures organizes out thinking and acting, initiatives to create juster and more democratic “pedagogical infrastructures” will emerge.

The issue of infrastructure literacy also becomes crucial in relation to another feature often discussed in relation to infrastructures, namely that investments and development of infrastructures always depart from a more or less articulated vision of a desired future (Edwards, 2003; Jasanoff, 2015). Roads are built to manage more traffic, thus supporting a future of more commuting, trade and cargo transport. In the same way, schools are equipped with certain infrastructures to create certain subjects with skills and competences enabling a certain future. In order to see the affordances built into educational technology and what kind of future society they prioritize, teachers and students need to develop different “literacy about infrastructures and the

relations that take shape through and around them” (Parks, 2010 n.p. ).

### **What does the future look like in Swedish educational policy?**

Sweden is currently undergoing a process of school digitalization, most notably through the revision of the national curricula to promote digital competence of teachers and pupils, performed by the Swedish National Agency for Education, on behalf of the Swedish government.<sup>1</sup> So, what kind of future is this new infrastructure supporting, and is it visible for those involved in it?

The studied documents follows the tendency described by Friesen and Hug (2009) to treat media as something separate from the school milieu in general, as either media literacy education, dealing with popular culture and “mass media” outside school, or as educational technology. In other words, media is understood either as content or as tools used for learning or producing own content, never as “ the ‘water’ in which teachers and students would figuratively ‘swim’ (ibid, p. 73).

Whereas the critical skills to access and analyse media content is associated with media literacy education, the use of digital media tools demand what is known as *digital competence*, a “more or less a political concept, reflecting beliefs and even wishes about future needs” (Ilomäki, Kantosalo, & Lakkala, 2011, p. 1). However, in the analysed policies these two interests seem to merge and the concept digital competence is used to both describe critical skills traditionally associated with media literacy, and claims about digital technology as increasing efficiency in schools. Similarly, approaches like creativity, interdisciplinary and innovation are highlighted not only as important for well-being, but also as skills important for economic growth.

#### **“The modernization of Sweden starts in school”**

In the studied documents, there is also a clear tendency to describe the future as already predetermined. The objectives for including digital competence in the curricula includes “preparing for an increasingly technology oriented work life and society” (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2015, p. 2) and being “able to

orient oneself in a complex reality with a vast flow of information, increased digitalization and rapid changes” (Skolverket, 2017, p. 3). These statements expose the assumption that society will continue to develop in the same direction as in the last thirty years, with increased digitalization and a precarious labour market. The idea that schools have to adjust to this development follows the common imaginary of the information society “in which technological innovations are regarded as accidental outcomes or shocks that disrupts society and to which society must adjust” (Mansell, 2012, p. 50).

At the same time, there are passages suggesting the opposite, that processes of societal change must begin in school, and that the competences and knowledg-

*Infrastructure literacy is thus about both visualizing infrastructures in order to facilitate civic participation in debates about network ownership, development, and access.*

es obtained through education will shape our future societies. Hence, the very first headline of the Swedish national digitalization strategy (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2017, p. 3) is “The modernization of Sweden starts in school”. The idea that what we do in school is crucial for how societies, economy and national identity will develop is paradoxical in relation to statements suggesting a future predetermined by technology. However, this figure of an already determined future can be understood as a way to motivate investment and policy changes in a certain direction, such as highlighting entrepreneurship and flexibility as important future skills, associated with digital competence.

In addition to imaginaries about societal and individual transformation, there are a number of sections discussing educational technology as transforming schools and learning a such. It is an undisputed assumption throughout the material, that digital tools “contribute to better results and efficiency” (Skolverket, 2015, p. 4) and is “effective to follow up the individual knowledge acquisition in children and pupils” (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2017, p. 12). Indeed, as shown by Neil Selwyn (2014) and Ben Williamson (2016), education of tomorrow seems to be character-

ized by efficiency and goal fulfillment. New technologies are assumed to improve the quality and speed of learning as well as the assessment of knowledge at the same time as the digitization of learning content will make it more accessible and flexible.

But although digital technology has all these gains, there is no discussion about how the mediation of communication or content prioritizes certain kinds of knowledge, or what the environmental effects of mass-digitalization will be. Instead, the argument seems to be that teachers and students might think less about material conditions, such as accessing books, or orienting in digital systems, because developers (while having received their basic skills, or technical interest in the general school) think more about it. School digitalization and media education policy in Sweden thus build on a separation between developers and users.

### **The invisibility of user-friendly technology**

It is clear that whereas critical skills are emphasized when it comes to media content outside the school context, they are to a large degree missing when it comes to the tools, technologies and systems used in schools. Accordingly, in the Swedish digitalization policy (2015, p. 25) we can read that:

Technology mustn't hinder school work, and technological support must be made available to secure undisrupted connection, functioning stationary equipment such as projectors, and replace malfunctioning equipment in order for teaching to go on without technology related disturbance.

In other words, as also stated in an appendix to the same policy (2015, p. 86) the goal is to “make technology as invisible as possible”. What we recognize here is the kind of “concealment strategy” that Parks (2010) discusses, motivated with user friendliness and to ease the workload for teachers. Without suggesting that poor digital systems or support would be an appropriate way to enhance teacher’s infrastructure literacy, the strive for invisibility is potentially dangerous because what is concealed is not only bugs and messiness, but also the choices and priorities built into digital systems. If these assumptions about what education is supposed to do and what society it is supposed

to shape, are not made visible, teachers and students have no possibility to renegotiate this imagined future.

However, if the MIL strand present in the documents were expanded to include also infrastructure literacy, these technological affordances might be up for debate instead of concealed, and more democratic pedagogical infrastructures can be developed, in dialogue with teachers and students, instead of from the outside where teachers and students are positioned as users. By admitting the structuring qualities of media technologies, as well as how different kinds of infrastructures are entangled with institutions, history, geography, economy and cultural practice, taken for granted ideas about individualism and the necessity of economic growth that to some degree underpins the current problems with news resistance and mistrust in authorities can be addressed, as well as questions on sustainable development.

### **How can an infrastructural perspective contribute to MIL?**

Despite statements of life quality and citizenship, teachers and learners in Swedish digitalization policy and K-12 curricula are mainly positioned as users, with the right to user-friendly systems and technological support. This concealing of infrastructures, and separation between user and developer makes the affordances of digital systems as well as the assumptions about a desired future, harder to see and critique. In order for schools to become places where we renegotiate future imaginaries and formulates questions around what kind of society we want to live in, the media infrastructures used in education and daily life must be made visible. The argument brought forth in this text has therefore been to include material perspectives on media that expands the current understand of media as either content or tools, in order to make the critical claim of MIL truly functional in the complex media landscape of today. This kind of infrastructure literacy might also take in consideration the environmental concerns related to digital media, and expand what we recognize as valid knowledge, in formal as well informal education. Eventually, such an approach should also lead to the formation of more democratic and transparent infrastructures for education and knowledge production. ❖

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## FOOTNOTE

- <sup>1</sup> The documents analysed in this paper are all related to this process, and include the commission from the Ministry of Education to propose national IT strategies for the school system (2015), the commission report from the Swedish National Agency for Education (2015) and the resulting documents from this report, namely the revised *Swedish National Curriculum for the Compulsory School (2017)* and a *National Digitalization Strategy for the School System (2017)*.

# Construction and incorporation of the media literacy concept in communication studies in Mexico: First approach

By Janneth Trejo-Quintana<sup>1</sup>, Nacional Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Mexico



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## Abstract

In order to know the perspectives, advances, gaps, as well as the experts that have worked on a specific topic, it is necessary to identify, order and document how the field has developed through the years. Among the communication sciences, the “media education”, or more recently, the “media literacy” (along with digital and informational literacy) has been used with a certain breadth. However, the genealogy of this topic has been absent in Mexico. Therefore, from a literature review, this paper offers a scope on how Media Education or Media Literacy has been studied in Mexico. The course of the concept, the authors who have worked on it, as well as their methodologies and theoretical approaches have been explored.

**Keywords: Mexican communications studies, construction and incorporation of concepts, media literacy, education for media, educommunication**

The interest on this topic emerged in 2013. For this research, the initial step was to get acquainted with different authors and approaches about the Media and Digital Literacy in Mexico. However, tracing the development of this area of knowledge soon proved to be a quite difficult task. As no

complete treatment of the state of the art on Media Literacy in Mexico was available, then the idea of working on a project that could encompass who were the scholars, which theoretical standpoints existed, which methodologies were used on the subject, as well as the progress and deficiencies within the field, was very attractive. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to trace the progress of Media and Digital Literacy in Mexico. The first question that guided this research project was: How has the field, study and analysis been developed in Mexico? From there, two more questions emerged: Which experts have worked Media Literacy in Mexico? What are the debates around the subject and how did they develop?

The starting point was that although the concept of Media Literacy in Mexico has been used only recently, the scanning and critical interpretation of the messages and discourse conveyed by the mass media have been treated under different names, such as “education towards media,” “media education,” and/or “educommunication.” These terms can be used indistinctly with what we now call Media Literacy, since all of them point in the same direction: the empowerment of people in order to read and interpret with a critical perspective the messages consumed by different media users.<sup>2</sup>

Specifically, this project has been developed as a documental research, making it necessary to con-

sult vast bibliography. The inquiries to find and get essays, books, papers and theses in university libraries were made using specialized catalogs and search engines on the Web focused on areas and sub-areas in the field of Communication Sciences. This research focused on subjects such as: education towards media, media literacy, educommunication, studies on critical reception of the media, and subjects related to what we know today as Media and Digital Literacy.

The bibliography was collected in two ways: first through catalogs in university libraries, book repositories, or in the websites of academic journals and in social networks dedicated to academic research.<sup>3</sup> At this point, 213 texts about the previously mentioned subjects were found.

The search of other bibliographic materials heavily relied on the catalog of documents of the Communication Sciences CC-DOC.<sup>4</sup> This catalog gathers the biggest part of academic work in the field of Communication Sciences in the country. Due to its constant updates and since 2,335 related texts were found there, it was fundamental for this research. A total of 2,548 texts were collected for this research. It is worth mentioning that most of them referred to “education towards media,” followed by texts on “media literacy,” while texts dealing with “digital literacy” and “media literacy” were the less frequently found among the selected material.

Given the amount of texts, as well as the wide range of scopes, authors, institutions, publishers, and dates of publication, a careful selection was required, and, from it, the corpus to be analyzed was established.

### Difficulties at hand

- Access to the material

It wasn't always possible to gain access to certain texts. Such deficiency was frequently observed in publications before the year 2000. Therefore, only the bibliographic references were registered, and the natural decision was to exclude them from the analysis.

- Redundancy

The same text could appear on different repositories. Upon examination of the raw amount of material, the repetition of texts was noticed in different catalogs and repositories.

- False positives

The bibliographical search was conducted

through keywords. Although a previous acquaintance with the subject was obviously required, after more detailed considerations it became apparent that a number of the texts dealt with topics that were different from the information on their abstracts, tables of content, or even in their titles.

In order to overcome these difficulties new criteria were applied on the total material, and from the originally 2,548 texts, only 8% (that is 202 texts) met the criteria to consolidate the corpus of this study.

### Preliminary findings

- About authors

From the final 202 texts, the names of 144 different authors were noted. More than 90% of them contributed with a single text on the topic, 5% wrote two to five texts, 3% of the names appeared on ten to fifteen, leaving 2% with the highest individual production of papers, chapters, or books on this research subject matter. Among them: Delia Crovi Druetta, Mercedes Charles Creel, Raúl Fuentes Navarro, and Guillermo Orozco Gómez are worth to mention. Without question, the most prolific author is Guillermo Orozco, who is the standard authority in the study of critical reception of mass media, and media literacy in Mexico.

Image 1. The most prolific authors on the topic of Educommunication in Mexico



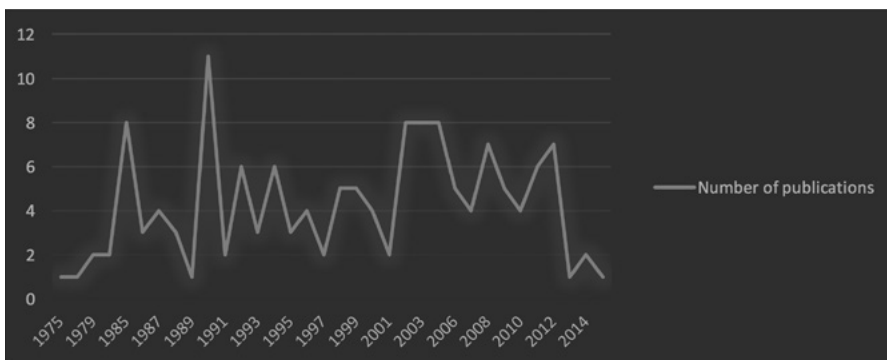
- Publication date

During the bibliographical search, some texts found were from the 70's of the previous century. Specifically, this research contains documents ranging

from the mid-seventies to 2016. After analyzing the amount of texts throughout these years, less than half the academic production under study was published by the end of the past century. Consequently, most of the selected material was published between 2000 and 2016.

It should be mentioned that the research production on this topic was not constant over that period. An outstanding number of publications can be observed during the first years of the 80's, but a climax was reached by the beginning of the 90's. As the decade came near to its end, the production declined, and it wasn't until 2001 that it increased again. Although production dealing with the subject has not reached such peaks as at the beginning of the 90's, the number of texts published during the years of the current century reflects sustained interest on it.

**Graph. Research on educommunication in Mexico. Publications from 1975 to 2016**  
*This line graph was prepared using personally collected data*



- Publishers

While browsing through the different organizations that worked on the edition of the bibliography collected, the results closely mirror the behavior observed previously: there is a high concentration of academic production in just few publishers. Universities tend to be important means in the diffusion of academic research; but surprisingly, in this case, their presence is relatively small, or at least not as outstanding as it would be expected.

College journals ever present are Society and Communication (University of Guadalajara), Studies on Contemporary Cultures (University of Colima), several publications by the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the Mexican Journal of Social and Political Sciences is worth mentioning; also the journal

Version of the Autonomous Metropolitan University (campus Xochimilco), and lastly, Sign and Thought (Javierian University of Colombia). Colleges, along with specialized journals, provide also several theses. A number of them, at the graduate and postgraduate levels, were included in this study. Additionally, there are also various institutions working in the diffusion of knowledge in the field of communication. Such is the case of the annual publication of the CONEICC (National Council for the Teaching and Research of the Communication Sciences), the journal Dialogs of FELAFACS (Latin-American Federation of Faculties of Social Communication), the journals Chasqui and Communicating, but beyond any doubt the institution from which the largest number of texts was obtained, especially from the 90's and the beginnings of the 21st century, was the journal "Technology and Education" of the Latin-American Institute of Educative Communication (ILCE).

Also, among the publishers interested in the edition of texts about this research subject, there are a few commercial companies, such as Trillas.

- Keywords

The use of certain terminology provides insight into the theoretical and methodological perspective by which any study is directed. With this in mind, keywords were analyzed within the corpus.

On one hand, the use of this criterion allowed a better knowledge of the characteristics of the corpus; on the other hand, it helped to confront the fact that consistency is sometimes lacking between the titles and the concepts through which the specific aim of the work is oriented. Because of that, a brief consideration of certain findings is pertinent: the term "literacy" is a keyword dating from the beginning of the 21st century, there are no previous references; there is no consensus in the use of the term "literacy", some examples of the wide variety of terms are:

- Audiovisual literacy
- Digital culture literacy
- Electronic literacy
- Information literacy
- Hypermedia literacy



Image 2. Some journals that has published about Educommunication in Mexico



- Informatics literacy
- Media literacy
- Technological literacy
- Literacy for television
- Digital illiteracy

Despite all the above, “media literacy” qualifies as one of the most used terms, but “digital literacy” appears with highest frequency in the texts of this research. On the other hand, texts from the 90’s very frequently used the term “pedagogy”. It was often indistinctly used in the sense of “schooling”, “teaching” and “education” as it is shown in the following examples:

- Critical pedagogy
- Pedagogy of communication
- Pedagogy of television
- Emancipatory pedagogy of reception

“Educommunication” and “education for communication” rarely appeared among the keywords. “Media education” showed a more consistent presence than the previous two. Nevertheless, the most frequently used term in the corpus was “education for media,” hand to hand with “educative communication.”

As it can be observed, “education” and “communication” can appear as two key concepts within the corpus, but in many of the texts, they receive a different treatment. In the next place, terms like “ICT,” “communication” and “educative communication”

achieve the third place in being mentioned as key concepts in this research. Lastly, “television” is the second most utilized word while the first is “education”.

The fact that “television” appeared with constant frequency as a keyword in the selected literature, allowed to observe that this mass medium has been more widely analyzed by specialists of the education media field or related subjects. Maybe it is so because of the wide spread opinion that television is the medium that most impact the cognitive and socialization processes of people in general, but children and young people particularly.

“Education” is the most frequently used word in the literature of the corpus, partly because much of it is connected with the ambit of schools, where media are viewed as tools able to aid the pedagogy and didactics in the teaching and learning processes. This perspective was widely observed within the total number of texts selected for this research; even during the sampling process there were some publications centered on the ways in which mass media and/or new technologies could strictly help in the classroom. Nevertheless, the goal of this study was to analyze the theoretical and methodological applica-

*Tracing a map of the origins of media literacy in Mexico helps to develop and consolidate a specific area of knowledge, but also, even if indirectly, it contributes to promote critical access and comprehension of the media language, in order that users can evaluate the different aspects of mass media and their contents.*

tions of education towards media (consumption), not the presence of media in the education process. Why? Because the heart of our interest lies in making a contribution to propagation of media literacy, understood as an open gate to develop the ability to use, understand, and interact with the field of the mass media as we presently experience it, which is essential to the kind of literacy required by our world today.

Tracing a map of the origins of media literacy

in Mexico helps to develop and consolidate a specific area of knowledge, but also, even if indirectly, it contributes to promote critical access and comprehension of the media language, in order that users can evaluate the different aspects of mass media and their contents. In Mexico there is a need to consolidate not only media literacy as an important area within the study of communication, but precisely media literacy for itself as a fundamental part in the creation of a stronger democracy and proactive citizens in their civic duties. ❖

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#### FOOTNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> The hypothesis underlying the present work is that technological changes and the fact that concepts as MIL (advanced by the UNESCO) became common currency on an international level, and they account for the integration of new conceptions to the kind of analysis previously conducted by Mexican and Latin-American scholars since the 70's.

<sup>3</sup> Academia.edu and ResearchGate.net. This Project is supported by ITESO and CONACYT and is currently under the supervision of Dr. Raul Fuentes Navarro.

# Media literacy: concepts and misconceptions (or the risk to use the same term to report on different sets of skills)

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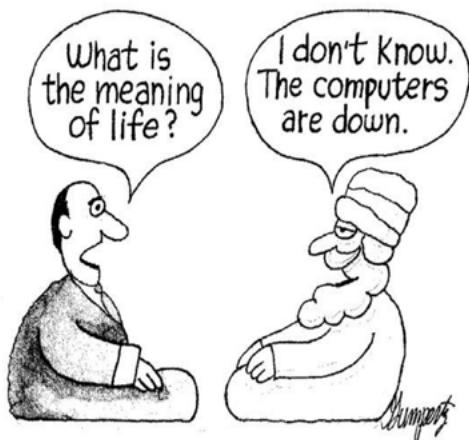


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## Abstract

A significant risk when reporting about the status of Media Literacy in any sector lies in definitions. Considering the definitions of concepts like Media Literacy, Information Literacy, Media Education and other literacies, we attempt to provide a summary report on the current MIL status in Greece and briefly see how new media can lead to a new educational paradigm of teaching and learning.

**Keywords: media literacy, concepts, education, Greece**



## Concepts and misconceptions

A significant risk when reporting about the status of Media Literacy in any sector lies in definitions. Different interpretations of key MIL terms (either on substantial or merely preferential terms) may lead to misconceptions, which may misdirect assessment of citizens' needs, thus obscure appropriate policy making.

MIL researchers know that Media Literacy as a concept is not identical to Media Education, though the two overlap in some areas. In general terms, Media Education is "the process of teaching and learning about media" (Buckingham, 2003); while Media Literacy consists of a series of communication competencies, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication (National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) 2016). UNESCO has promoted the concept of Media and Information Literacy (MIL), arguing that in the digital age, media literacy should integrate with information literacy and ICT skills so that people can learn how to handle media messages and information coming from all sources and platforms (Wilson, Grizzle, Tuazon, Akyempong & Cheung, 2011).

However, frequently these terms are confused both in public discourse and in practice. For example, when reporting about the sector of education, experience shows that MIL is sometimes interpreted as Media Education or merely Digital Literacy.

### **Media and Information Literacy in Greece**

Media literacy policies in Greece are drafted by the Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecoms and Media, mainly through the Secretariat General for Media & Communication, and the Ministry of Education; in the latter case it is worth mentioning the role of the Educational Radio-Television Department and various past and current programs (MEDEANET, the European School Radio, student's film competitions, prizes and awards, training workshops on new media and online material), which are offered on a complementary basis, but are not included in the formal national curriculum. In 2016 school reform was in public consultation and media literacy concepts were raised. However, no outcomes have been published thereof and no initiatives have been adopted.

During the last decade, MIL concepts have been introduced in the public discourse in Greece, and several organized activities take place. How accurate, though, are we when we use all the different "literacy" terms? Let's take the example of formal education.

In Greek schools Media Literacy as such is not included in the formal curriculum. In summary, the Greek education system is characterized by a high quantity of information, fragmentary approaches and neglect of soft skills:

- It is heavily content-based: students deal with masses of information, but they do not really learn how to use, analyze and benefit from it.
- Skills like critical thinking, analysis, evaluation, deduction, abstracting or finding suitable sources are not given enough attention at school.
- Educators are not usually adequately trained in media -or sometimes even digital- skills, since MIL subjects are not covered in most pedagogic schools in Universities. Even during their teaching practice, teachers do not have opportu-

nities to receive much MIL training: for example, the (not so many) ICT courses officially offered to teachers by the State do not guide them to use technology in the classroom, but rather focus on issues like the difference between RAM and ROM memory in desktop computers!

- And, yet, there is a "Fake news" column on Ministry's website!

In secondary education most students are already expert users of mobile devices. But when they are requested to do homework research, they often just Google some words (not always the suitable key words) and copy paste the first results returned. Apart from the quality and relevance of the data returned by search engines, in comparison to the accumulated structured and evaluated general human knowledge, the main problem in such practices is that students are getting used to the easy solution of the one-size-fits-all online search source.

ICT training is included in the national curriculum (in the Ministry's programs' mission statements in the last decade we can read that subjects as ICT skills, ICT literacy, Digital literacy or Knowledge Society are included in secondary and primary education). Also, code programming or STEAM activities are occasionally offered as an extra course in some schools, which participate in certain programs, or relevant after-school activities are organized at the schools' premises (either by the school itself, or local authorities, or by Parents' Associations, which have turned into a flexible vehicle to introduce such initiatives).

In general, Media Literacy has significantly improved in Greece in recent years: international bibliography is translated into Greek, organizations are being established, relevant content is being created, academic papers are produced, public and private entities implement projects and NGOs have started working for the promotion of MIL skills in a more organized way. Their activities span from content production in the Greek language to the creation of internet safety guidelines or to the design of specialized trainings for the general public.

However, in general, Media Literacy Skills at school

- Are usually offered on an ad hoc basis, depending on educator’s own knowledge and motivation;
- Are often presented as “digital skills” or “internet safety guidelines”;
- Are frequently confused with ICT practical skills;
- Are not yet introduced in the formal national curriculum or in the classroom practices; further, they are not prioritized in teachers’ training programs, or in the production & use of educational multimedia tools.

### **News Literacy**

Contrary to MIL, news literacy is not yet introduced in the public discourse. Neither young people nor expert readers are guided to learn how to read, understand and evaluate the news -offline or online- while social media users tend to acquire the habit to “consume” content that their friends read, or tend to skip actual news and read opinions about the news. Yet, this is not a local phenomenon in Greece; experience and literature show that in both MIL-developed and MIL-developing countries misinformation is a serious issue.

However, News Literacy Skills are crucial, for adults and minors alike, both for academic pursuits and for civic action, so that people are able to make the right decisions, as active engaged citizens in society, local communities, and strong democratic societies. Media & News Literacy play an important role in democracy and should be protected as a fundamental right of all citizens of all ages.

### **Reporting on MIL**

As regards organizations and networks relating to media literacy currently in Greece, they include (indicatively, not exclusively): the Secretariat General for Media and Communication; UNESCO GAPMIL—Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy (2013); International Olympia Film Festival for Children and Young People—European Meeting of Young People’s Audiovisual Creation; EU Media Literacy Expert Group of the DG Connect of the EC; MEDEAnet project (2014); Karpos - Center of Education and Intercultural Communication; Open

Technologies Alliance (GFOSS); Media Literacy Institute or the EU co-funded SafeInternet4Kids.

A recent report on MIL in Greece is included in the 2016 European Audiovisual Observatory Report: “Mapping of media literacy practices and actions in EU-28”. This paper, though it has been introduced as a MIL report, it actually focuses on audiovisual content, as stated in its introductory statement and scope, covering non-curricular training cases, but not formal education.

In particular, the report covers case studies targeting a broad audience group of students and adults and focuses on 25 key media literacy stakeholders, with a special focus on film education. It also includes the “First Nationwide Study on Media Literacy in Greek Schools”.

*Teachers have to change their way of teaching so that they can motivate their students to become involved in active participatory learning and in the smart and wise use of new media.*

However, when reading any country report about MIL we should consider the kind of literacy covered. For example, film literacy should certainly be included in the general scope of a Media and Information Literacy policies, since indeed, both historically and technologically-wise, the audio-visual sector has been leading innovations in the media field; however, from a national policy making point of view, the basic MIL skills in formal education should come first, as the sine qua non top priority prerequisites for developing young generations’ critical thinking, aiming at the wise perception and ethical generation and sharing of information, which are the necessary MIL skills for all citizens, for any country wishing to participate in the knowledge society.

### **Media literacy and other literacies**

So, it seems that not all “media literacies” are Media and Information Literacy! According to Renee Hobbs, Chris Worsnop, Neil Andersen, Jeff Share and Scott Sullivan of the Center for Media Literacy, Media literacy differs from other literacies:

- “Media ‘bashing’ is NOT media literacy; however media literacy sometimes involves criticizing the media.
- Merely producing media is NOT media literacy, although media literacy should include media production.
- Just teaching with videos or CDRoms or other mediated content is NOT media literacy; one must also teach about media.
- Simply looking for political agendas, stereotypes or misrepresentations is NOT media literacy; there should also be explorations of the systems making those representations appear “normal.”
- Looking at a media message or a mediated experience from just one perspective is NOT media literacy because media should be examined from multiple positions.
- Media Literacy does NOT mean “don’t watch;” it means “watch carefully, think critically.”

If critical thinking and evaluation of information is the goal and purpose, the kinds of literacy to be promoted have to be carefully prioritized in national policies and educators have to be adequately trained.

### **MIL: new way of teaching & learning**

As the media change quickly, contemporary schools are facing great challenges. In the knowledge society, young people need to cultivate high-order thinking skills (Collins & Halverson, 2009). They no longer need to memorize information and in the primary levels, they do not need to learn particular subjects, but rather generic skills. Education scholars have pointed out that people in the 21st century need five groups of skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008). In addition to “knowledge of core subjects” (language, mathematics, science, history, economics, etc), “life and career skills,” and “twenty-first century themes” (global awareness, financial, business and entrepreneurial literacy, and civic literacy), they also need: “information, media, and technology skills” (information literacy, media literacy, and ICT literacy) and “learning and innovation skills” (creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, and communication and collaboration). In brief, media literacy and

the 4C skills (critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration) are crucial for students to survive in the contemporary society.

As tablets, laptop computers and smart-phones become more popular, using IT for teaching and learning becomes natural. To nurture competent knowledge society participants in the 21st century, it is impossible to continue with the traditional approach of using computers only for drills and to help learners memorize information for examinations. Information today is readily accessible and new content can be easily and massively produced. Newer educational concepts should be adopted, to encourage teachers to implement an open-end learning ambient by use of new media, encouraging collaborative groups of students to use technology to solve meaningful problems. If teachers change the manner they employ to guide students to use technology, they can make a difference to student learning. It is imperative for education policy makers to update both curricula and pedagogies.

### **New media lead to new educational model**

Teachers have to change their way of teaching so that they can motivate their students to become involved in active participatory learning and in the smart and wise use of new media. It is necessary to develop new methods and innovative pedagogies, which require a shift in the education paradigm. A media literacy curriculum can create “meaning” and “relevance” for the Net-Generation students. By promoting MIL through new media, students can be highly motivated and their 4C skills (critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration) can be largely enhanced.

According to Collins & Halverson, 2009, the new educational model will have the following characteristics:

#### **1. Student-centered instruction**

Student-centered instruction emphasizes understanding the world as a person, rather than copy-pasting content as a copycat. Understanding the world requires students to reflect and actively process and handle information. They have to act in the world, think profoundly about different issues and develop a new understanding, by combining what they know and what they observe.

## 2. Open-ended learning

It is important to create an open-ended learning environment that promotes inquiry-based, problem-based, and project-based learning.

## 3. Innovative use of IT/media

Mobile devices and the Internet can be used to create a convenient, user-friendly, and stimulating learning environment.

## 4. Collaborative learning

Teachers can use instructional processes that facilitate informed collaboration and the development of communication skills among students and encourage them to share learning strategies and views.

## 5. Active search for answers by students

In the new paradigm, students will be encouraged to think critically and actively seek solutions to real-world problems. They will be encouraged to find meaning in the information they are given and to apply what they learn to everyday life.

## The way forward

A new OECD study has been announced for Greece to be published in 2018, titled “*Education Policy in Greece: An OECD Review*”, with education policy recommendations to the Greek government about:

- Effective governance;
- Policies for school improvement;
- Improving the efficiency, equity and quality of the entire education system; and
- Addressing the quality, governance and funding of tertiary education

We are waiting for the study to see if and how Media Literacy concepts will be included.

By all means, accuracy of terms, training the professionals, introducing media & news literacy in schools and educating the general public should be immediate priorities for any national MIL education policy. Also, we should definitely train educators to introduce media literacy and news literacy in the classroom as soon as possible. However, it is necessary that we accurately use the right terms for the right set of skills, so as to produce the right sets of national policies. ❀

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# Digital Citizenship 2.0: Beyond Fear Mongering

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## Abstract

In an effort to prepare young people for digital participation, many primary and secondary schools in the United States and around the world employ what is commonly referred to as “digital citizenship education,” which largely focuses on kindness and etiquette online. However, this approach does not effectively prepare users for active, informed, and savvy participation in online spaces. This article lays out an alternative framework for a new type of digital citizenship education which prepares young people not to be kind online but rather to be technology ethicists. The goals of this new digital citizenship, as well as curricular moves that schools can make to achieve these goals, will be discussed. In some cases, links to curriculum materials will be provided.

**Keywords:** digital citizenship, citizenship education, digital literacy, computer science, curriculum

## Digital Citizenship in Schools Today

By and large, K-12 schools in the United States recognize that part of their job is to prepare young people for a world mediated by technology. The National Conference of State Legislators tracks state policies that provide funding for computer science courses, devices for students and teachers, digital resources such as e-textbooks, and professional development for educators.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, distinction has been made between “active” and “passive”

technology use, as the Office of Educational Technology aims to close the “digital-use divide”<sup>2</sup> by ensuring that students are using technology to demonstrate knowledge and create, not just as an updated paper and pencil to fill in digital worksheets.

As K-12 schools and policymakers think about how best to prepare young people to be skilled users of digital technologies, they are also thinking about how to prepare young people to be responsible and ethical users. The most pervasive approach taken to do this is often labeled as “digital citizenship education.” This seems to follow in the empowering tradition of citizenship education<sup>3</sup> more generally. UNESCO defines “citizenship education” as “educating children, from early childhood, to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society,” and that “knowledge of the nation’s institutions” forms an essential component to any citizenship education. Using this definition as a jumping off point, we could say that “digital citizenship education” would give young people the background knowledge needed to participate in the development of these “digital institutions.”

But the reality of what “digital citizenship education” looks like in schools is far different. Digital citizenship is often reduced to a conversation about kindness and etiquette, with a hyperfocus on reducing cyberbullying and sexting. In popular curricula developed by organizations like Common Sense Education, the Internet and the technologies that get you there are positioned as dangerous, and young people must learn to be safe and protect themselves while using



them.<sup>4</sup> There is a pervasive sense of fear; parents are given information about which apps they do not know their children are using, and parents and school IT departments determine which monitoring software is best for their context.

There is certainly a time and place for ongoing conversations around these issues, and not just when inevitable problems arise. Official statistics state that 15% of high school students have been cyberbullied, and vulnerable populations report a much higher rate of cyberbullying (55.2% for LGBTQ youth).<sup>5</sup> But compare these numbers to Pew Research Center's findings on teen technology use, which reports that 95% of teens have access to a smartphone and 45% say that they are online "almost constantly."<sup>6</sup> It is clear that a majority of young people have positive or at least neutral experiences online, and so a kindness- and fear-based approach to digital citizenship education just does not ring true for a majority of young people.

So what does a more impactful and powerful digital citizenship education look like? What is required for not just skilled but also responsible and ethical use and digital participation? What do users need to understand and know in order to enable full "digital citizenship?" This paper lays out the beginnings of a new approach to digital citizenship education, starting first with a revised sense of what our goals should be, followed by the key components of this new approach and some specific curricular/pedagogical moves that can make these components come alive in the classroom.

## **The Goals of a "New" Digital Citizenship Education**

Whereas the goals of digital citizenship education today are primarily centered around developing kind and respectful users of the Internet, the goals of a "new" digital citizenship education would be to develop users who are informed, savvy, and skilled users of the Internet and digital technologies. More specifically, the following goals can be used to guide the development of a school's new digital citizenship education.

### **1. Focus on how the tools work.**

A "new" digital citizenship education should inform young people about how the tools that they use work.

This understanding does not need to be hypertechnical. Rather, young people should simply come to see these tools as constructed, built by other humans who have various motivations.

This may sound like a modest aim, but in many ways this is radical. Much of the technology development in recent years has been moving towards hiding the complexity of technologies. For example, Apple products such as iPhones and iPads are not designed to be taken apart by consumers, but rather to be seen as a "black box" of sorts that must be taken to a specialist (or at least the retailer itself) to be fully accessed. In fact, states are currently pushing "right to repair" laws, which would legally mandate companies to allow consumers to decide where and how they will seek maintenance of their devices.<sup>7</sup>

And it is not just hardware that creates this sense of mystery. The Internet itself is most often referred to as "the cloud," evoking a sense of ephemerality and naturalness. When the Internet is a cloud, users are discouraged from seeing this tool as the very physical thing that it is, made up of wires, cords, manholes, satellites, and more. "The cloud" erases any sort of human hand in the construction of the Internet. And when a technology is seen as natural, then its users do not question the decisions that other humans have made in its development.

But UNESCO's definition of citizenship education calls for citizens to be participants in decisions concerning society, and so digital citizens should be informed enough to realistically participate in the development of digital tools. When this new digital citizenship education highlights the constructed, built nature of Internet technologies, then it invites young people to explore the why: Why did developers make certain decisions when they built these tools? What were their motivations? Why did they not make different decisions? When users begin to explore why developments occurred the way in which they did, then users can begin to imagine alternative paths forward, and see themselves as active participants in the construction of future technologies.

### **2. Prepare graduates to be "technology ethicists."**

The goal of this new type of digital citizenship education should not be to develop young people that will exist uncritically within the existing technology

ecosystem. UNESCO's call for citizenship education to produce "clear thinking and enlightened" citizens is a clear mandate for citizens to be active, not passive, participants. A new digital citizenship education should prepare young people to demand and expect authentic agency as users of the Internet and new technologies, and this agency should be in service to a more ethical technology ecosystem. In other words, digital citizenship education should aspire to developing users as "technology ethicists."

A technology ethicist understands the ways in which technologies can either be used for good or for ill, and actively values that which will produce the most good for society. As users come to understand how technologies actually work, they come to truly understand the implications of the current technolo-

gy ecosystem. For example, constant alerts from apps and the colorful, noisy rewards from digital games can lead to a real addiction to technology, as potent as an addiction to drugs or gambling.<sup>8</sup> And as a result of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, users are learning about how the algorithms of websites and apps aim to generate the most engagement from users, valuing the popularity of content over its veracity, resulting in the spread of fake news to sometimes violent consequences.<sup>9</sup> These are just two examples of the negative impact resulting directly from the way in which these technologies were designed.

### **3. Meant as a compliment to computer science education.**

Whereas digital citizenship education is aimed at the everyday user, computer science is primarily aimed at the future developer who requires specialized skills. Policymakers and educators have been working to increase access to computer science courses in K-12 schools for many years. The stated purpose is often vocational: a 2017 Memorandum for the Secretary of Education from President Trump asserted that a lack of access to computer science coursework puts young people "at risk of being shut out from some of the most attractive job options in the growing United States economy."<sup>11</sup> Computer science courses in K-12 schools fulfill an essential need, particularly as we look to increase the pipeline of candidates who are female and people of color for careers in computer science. This new digital citizenship education does not replace or run parallel to computer science education, but rather works hand in hand to enhance both areas of study.

The marriage of computer science and a new digital citizenship education is important for both the user and the future developer. For the user, a cursory experience with skills such as coding proves that this is not an inaccessible world; regular people with regular capabilities develop the technologies they use everyday. Working to demystify an otherwise seemingly impenetrable digital tool by exploring how it works discourages a sense of learned helplessness that can often lead users to throw up their hands in despair of ever understanding how an algorithm works. On the other hand, this new digital citizenship education trains the budding computer scientist to be an ethical developer. If we want new technologies to have a greater sense of ethics built into

*A technology ethicist understands the ways in which technologies can either be used for good or for ill, and actively values that which will produce the most good for society.*

gy ecosystem. For example, constant alerts from apps and the colorful, noisy rewards from digital games can lead to a real addiction to technology, as potent as an addiction to drugs or gambling.<sup>8</sup> And as a result of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, users are learning about how the algorithms of websites and apps aim to generate the most engagement from users, valuing the popularity of content over its veracity, resulting in the spread of fake news to sometimes violent consequences.<sup>9</sup> These are just two examples of the negative impact resulting directly from the way in which these technologies were designed.

Organizations like the Center for Humane Technology, co-founded by former Google Design Ethicist Tristan Harris, are advancing the idea that technology can be designed more humanely, so that technologies do not actively exploit our vulnerabilities in service of profit-making corporate motivations.<sup>10</sup> But the Center for Humane Technology believes that technologies will only be designed more humanely if there is a demand for it. Today, change in corporate policy is often reflective of the demands made by vocal and active consumers, and so the the-

them, then those who develop those technologies must have experience thinking through the ethical implications of certain design choices. This is often missing from computer science courses, which are primarily skill-building.

The integration of these subjects will require a cultural shift, as some educational institutions question the place of computer science within a liberal arts curriculum at all.<sup>12</sup> The way in which computer science and a new digital citizenship education interact and integrate will look differently in different school settings, but as this field grows and develops, we must ensure that both pedagogies are present.

### **Key Curricular/Pedagogical Components**

Above details the goals of a new digital citizenship education, so now the question becomes: How do we achieve those goals? What must be included as schools build a curriculum for classroom deployment? The following are key components to a new digital citizenship curriculum and pedagogy, and specific ideas for implementation. In some cases, links to curriculum materials will be provided.

#### **1. Create experiences.**

Many of the topics that ask young people to think like technology ethicists can feel esoteric and non-concrete, especially for students who may not have a technical background. For this reason, it is important to provide opportunities for students to experience concepts, not just read about or discuss them. For example, net neutrality is a perhaps dry topic, though on the radar of young people since popular YouTube stars have entered the discussion.<sup>13</sup> Turn net neutrality into a role-playing game, where students represent various stakeholders in the net neutrality debate, so that students can experience the consequences of this complex topic. (For specific activity materials, visit <http://bit.ly/NetNeutCiccone>.)

Another example would be to give students the experience of designing and prototyping a new technology. Asking students to prototype a new social media app is an engaging exercise, as this is a genre of tools that young people already have experience with and so they can readily feel like experts. There are sev-

eral free tools that students can use to create professional and functioning app prototypes (a more code-heavy experience includes code.org's App Lab and MIT's App Maker, or more design-focused tools like Marvel App and App Institute). By having students create a new app, students can immediately demonstrate their growing sense of design ethics.

#### **2. Tap into teenage cynicism.**

The cynical teenager is a long-held stereotype. It can be useful to tap into that cynicism in order to guide students away from developing a sense of helplessness at the current technology ecosystem, to instead developing a sense of agency. Highlight opportunities users have for choice, and point out where choice does not exist. For example, due to a lack of regulation of U.S. Internet Service Providers, Internet users in the United States do not have authentic choice in ISPs, which results in slower and more expensive Internet connections.<sup>14</sup>

International comparisons also provide opportunity for discussions around user agency. The recent example of Europe's General Data Protection Regulation highlights that there is not just one Internet; the Internet we interact with is location-dependent and guided by local mores and traditions around senses of privacy, free speech, and free markets. What once might have felt like "the way things are" suddenly be-

*The recent example of Europe's General Data Protection Regulation highlights that there is not just one Internet; the Internet we interact with is location-dependent and guided by local mores and traditions around senses of privacy, free speech, and free markets.*

comes a byproduct of deliberate policy decisions, all man-made conditions that also can have a man-made solution.

It is important, in these discussions, to maintain a neutral approach. Truly present these technology and policy developments as a choice among equal proposals. Young people have a natural sense of fairness, and there are reasonable arguments to be made on either side of many of these debates. Present both sides to students, and they will come to their own conclusions

of how things should develop moving forward. That experience of authentic choice will lead to an expectation of agency as technologies develop.

### 3. Let students practice digital participation in your classroom.

While young people are decidedly skilled at using digital technologies for entertainment purposes, young people do not necessarily have the skills necessary for purposeful digital participation. Teachers must provide opportunities for students to develop these skills. Included should be skills that are tool-specific (e.g. word processing, spreadsheets, digital presentations, etc.), information literacy, communication, and self-regulation skills. These skills that enable digital participation are most effectively learned through practice in authentic situations.

For example, classroom-based digital conversations provide students experience having thoughtful, evidence-based conversations around controversial topics. That code-switching between “digital communication for entertainment” and “digital communication for professional purposes” can be difficult, so experience in code-switching in schools is very helpful. Even when things do not go well -- for instance, when a student begins to “troll” -- the in-the-moment feedback that the student receives from peers and teacher is valuable and provides a rare opportunity to see the results of his/her contributions to a digital conversation. (For specific activity materials, visit <http://bit.ly/DigConvoCiccone>.)

### Conclusion

The potential of digital citizenship education is powerful, but the way that it currently is deployed in K-12 classrooms in the U.S. does not live up to this potential. By reframing the goals of digital citizenship education away from a focus on kindness and safety and towards a focus on developing technology ethicists, we can ensure that we are growing the next generation of developers and users who will ensure that the Internet and digital technologies are the powerful tools that we have always hoped they could be. ❖

### FOOTNOTES

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# NTC's 65th Anniversary Year Jessie McCanse Awards

**H**onoring NTC's co-founder Jessie Hill McCanse, this award is given for outstanding individual long-time contribution to the field of media literacy, exemplifying her high principles and dedication. Throughout this year, we are celebrating our four outstanding recipients individually at special events.



**William H. "Bill" Siemering** is a pioneer radio innovator and advocate. He was a member of the founding board of NPR and the author of its original "mission statement," the National Public Radio Purposes. As NPR's first director of programming Siemering helped shape its flagship program *All Things Considered* into an influential and enduring fixture of American media. Later, he developed *Fresh Air with Terry Gross* from a local to a national program. After a decades-long career in public radio, Siemering embarked on a second career of nurturing independent radio in the developing world.

*May in Madison, Wisconsin*



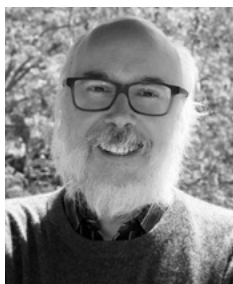
**Carolyn Wilson** is an award-winning Canadian educator, author and consultant who has worked in media and information literacy and global education for over 30 years at the K-12 and post-secondary levels, and for libraries, NGOs, media industries, and governments around the world. She is Chair of the Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy, a UNESCO-initiated alliance of over 600 organizations from 80 countries. She is currently the Program Coordinator in Teacher Education at the Faculty of Education, Western University, Canada.

*October in Kaunas, Lithuania*



**Marilyn A. Cohen** is Director of the Northwest Center for Excellence in Media Literacy, College of Education, University of Washington (UW) and Executive Director of the Seattle-based nonprofit Action for Media Education. She is a Research Associate Professor and was chair for the first Research Summit for media literacy at the National Association for Media Literacy Education held in St. Louis in 2007. Her work at the UW has received major support throughout the years for its focus on health issues such as teen pregnancy prevention, substance abuse prevention, violence prevention, and nutrition education for parents and their children.

*November in Seattle, Washington*



**Henry Jenkins** is the Provost's Professor of Communication, Journalism, Cinematic Art and Education at the University of Southern California and the founder and former director of the MIT Comparative Media Studies Program. He is the author/editor of more than 17 books on various aspects of media and popular culture, including most recently *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism* and *Participatory Culture In a Networked Era*.

*December in Washington D.C.*

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