ECML

Guideline for Media Literacy in Education

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Summary

This guideline gives an introduction to media literacy and media education, it aims at educators that need to be committed to the promotion of media literacy in our society.

Document History

Version History

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0.1	*First draft*	*03/09/04*	*Astrid Haider (CSI)*
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Summary of Changes

Version	Section(s)	Synopsis of Change
0.1	*All*	*Creation of the document*
0.2	*All*	*Creation of the last paragraph and final revision*
1.0	*All*	*Final document*

Note

Reviews after final document delivery (Version 1.0) to the project may or may not result in modifications to the document. If modifications post review are necessary, then the first version of the resultant document is 1.1.

Contents

1. Objective of this Document

This document aims at educators and focuses on the introduction to media literacy and media education.

It shall give a brief introduction to "why media literacy?", define the important terms and then set the goals for media education. The description of possible implementation strategies and success criteria for the improvement of media literacy including teaching hints shall improve the European Media education in schools.

2. Introduction

2.1 Why Media Literacy?

Media are essential in our lives. Through media we get most information we know, media entertain us, they influence and create our reality. Unfortunately media can never be neutral and value-free. The mass communication process via (mass) media has a great potential of reaching people all around the world. This may foster cosmopolitanism and democracy, but it also holds the danger of an increasing manipulation.

As a consequence it is important that we learn how to deal with media. Which media do we consume? To what extent can we believe what we see and hear?

Consumption of media starts in early childhood. According to a study carried out by *Livingstone* in 1999 the average child in the UK spends 5 hours a day with media[1]. TV, DVD, video, CDs, internet, and computer games are part of children's daily media diet. The figures of children's media consumption in other European countries are slightly lower, still one cannot deny the massive presence of media in children's and adults' lives. Whereas an adult can differentiate between fact and fiction it is hard for a small child to realise the difference. Many studies have been carried out of how media affect the behaviour and emotions of children. While some studies do not see a harmful impact of media, most come to the conclusion, that media can have a negative influence on children's actions and views[2]. Through media children sometimes learn behaviour and also their value system is shaped by media. "Hot topics" of media impact research are the effect of violence in the media as well as the influence of advertising to our consumer behaviour. But our health and body image are shaped and influenced by media as well. Media cause an acceleration of actions in life and therefore can also change our reflexes and reactions.

Various ways have been invented to diminish the media's sometimes negative impacts for children. TV ratings, internet filters and laws have been created, but they can be seen as a way of censorship. Media literacy education can be an alternative to these ways of censorship and represents an effective approach to widely shared concerns about the mass media's influence on children and youth[3].

Most educators today understand that with the revolutionary changes in communication that have occurred in the last half-century, media literacy has become as essential a skill as the ability to read the printed word. Through media education children can become media literate individuals.

This guideline gives an overview of how to become a media literate person. It will first of all make clear how we define media literacy and then discuss the goals of media education and how it can be implemented in schools.

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[1] For details see Livingstone (1999)

[2] Recent studies are inter alia: Gentile et al. (2004) and Josephson (2004) about the impact of media violence; Bulmer (2001) about the influence of advertising on children, and Morris, Katzman (2003) about the impact of media on eating disorders. An overview is given in Villani (2001).

[3] For details see Heins and Cho (2003)

3. Content

3.1 Definition Overview

What is media literacy and when can we speak of a media literate person? What is media education or media literacy education and is there a difference? The following passage will give an overview of the various terms and concepts.

3.1.1 Media Literacy

Being literate basically means to be able to read and write although many concepts exist. According to *Varis*[4] literacy is a relative term rather than an absolute one. Instead of defining a single level of when a person is literate, there are multiple degrees of literacy.
Media literacy expands this basic concept of being able to understand and produce printed text to all forms of communication. This concept includes
- the ability to understand and interpret visual images, static and moving, how the meanings of images are organised and constructed to make meaning, and to understand their impact on viewers;
- the ability to understand how mass media, such as TV, film, radio and magazines, work, produce meanings, and are organised and used wisely and
- the ability to understand how all speakers, writers, and producers of different kinds of messages are situated in particular contexts with significant personal, social and cultural aspects and values.

    Media literacy consists of three dimensions[5]:
    - Technical competencies: This means that one has to have access to different sorts of media and the ability to use media as a prerequisite for the other two dimensions.
    - Critical reception practices: This dimension consists of critical thinking skills. Students will develop an understanding of how media work. Rather than being passive consumers of media – TV shows, news information, the internet etc. – students learn that realities are constructed – to reflect ideas or values, to sell a product or to produce excitement. Students also learn how to spot a stereotype and to distinguish facts from opinions.
    - Content production: A third aspect of media literacy is the ability to produce and distribute content of media. Students cannot only use media but actively create media messages.

3.1.2 Media Education and Media Literacy Education

Education in general is of high significance in an information society. Life-long learning replaces traditional education and curricula. Education is a process from heteronomy to autonomy. This requires a critical approach to oneself and to society. Through media education students can develop these skills.
There is some confusion over the terms media education, media literacy education and media literacy. While it is sometimes regarded as interchangeable, most experts differentiate between these terms[6]. Media literacy is then seen as the outcome of media education. Some also differentiate between media education and media literacy education. Media education is at times divided into two components consisting of education through media and education about media.

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[4] see Varis (2003)
[5] see also Livingstone and Thumim (2003)
[6] For an overview see Fedorov (2003)

Others see media education only as the latter. In order to differentiate these two components education about media is then called media literacy education as opposed to media education.

This guideline will follow the UNESCO definition of media education which it published at its Vienna conference ‚Educating for the Media and the Digital Age' in 1999. Media education and media literacy education are seen as interchangeable. According to UNESCO media education

„...-deals with all communication media and includes the printed word and graphics, the sound, the still as well as the moving image, delivered on any kind of technology;

- enables people to gain understanding of the communication media used in their society and the way they operate and to acquire skills in using these media to communicate with others;

- ensures that people learn how to

- analyse, critically reflect upon and create media texts;
- identify the sources of media texts, their political, social, commercial and/or cultural interests, and their contexts;
- interpret the messages and values offered by the media;
- select appropriate media for communicating their own messages or stories and for reaching their intended audience;
- gain, or demand access to media for both reception and production" (UNESCO, 1999).

3.2 Guidelines – How to become a media literate person

Media education has been introduced in many European countries. As it varies across countries this section does not intend to impose a sample curriculum. It will rather outline various goals of media education and show what the outcome of media education can be. It will also point out conditions that have to exist in order to be able to implement media education in school and give an overview of how media education can be carried out in schools.

3.2.1 Goals in Media Education

Media competence consists of the ability to use and analyse media as well as of some knowledge of media systems.
When having a closer look one should be able to[7]
    collect information from different media formats
    select, analyse, structure, interpret and present data collected from traditional and new media
    be competent in orientating oneself in the media landscape, in developing strategies and making decisions
    use new media receptively and actively
    use media for communication purposes for national and international contacts
    know different media production forms such as books and other print media, film, TV, video, radio, new media as well their organisational structure and their sometimes mutual backgrounds
    have basic knowledge of the history of media development
    identify impacts of media on society and reflect upon their influences of media on our lives
    analyse and assess interests and intentions of media texts and products and recognise manipulative messages

In addition the ECML project has identified the following skills as essential to being media literate[8]. According to the ECML project a media literate person can

- understand that media are constructed to convey ideas, information and news from someone else's perspective,
- understand that specific techniques are used to create emotional effects,
- identify those techniques and their intended and actual effects,
- be aware that the media benefit some people, but leave others out,
- seek alternative sources of information and entertainment,
- use the media for their own advantage and enjoyment,
- know how to act, rather than being acted upon,
- prepare for the new learning culture, digital literacy.

3.2.2 Implementation

Media education can take place in diverse institutional settings. Formal media education plays a vital role in the process of media literacy formation although also informal learning areas will help the life-long learner to become a media literate person. Education systems in Europe differ a lot. Some countries have a more centralised system than others. Education systems also vary in the degree of autonomy to individual teachers.
This guideline concentrates on media literacy education in the formal school education system, this does not mean, however, that informal learning situations are seen as less relevant. Media education can be implemented in the formal school education system in two ways – as a separate subject in the curriculum or as an integral part of all subjects in school. Most countries that teach media education have opted for the latter version. Media literacy then is an interdisciplinary

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[7] compare with Bundesgesetzblatt (2004): 21
[8] Compare with the presentation of the ecml project on the internet: http://ecml.pc.unicatt.it/

subject. It is therefore not limited to certain classes or age groups although media education is most prevalent in mother-tongue education[9].

Many governments have published policy statements and curriculum documents in the field. There is a great diversity in terms of the aims and methods of media education, the participants who are involved in it, and the contexts in which it takes place.

3.3 Success criteria for media education in schools

This section of the guideline will provide an overview of experts' opinions of which criteria will lead to a successful media literacy education in schools[10]. The first part will point out some basic framework conditions that have to exist in order to be able to carry out good media literacy education, then success indicators for educators will be given.

Basic conditions[11]

- Curricula and curriculum guidelines must be established by the relevant authorities. Legislation must also include allocation of funds for development, dissemination and training.
- Faculties of education must introduce training on media literacy education, hire staff capable of training future teachers in this area and offer courses in media education. There should also be academic support from tertiary institutions in the writing of curricula and in sustained consultation.
- In-service educational opportunities at the school level for further training of educators in the area of media literacy education must be offered.
- Suitable textbooks, other teaching material and resources, and lesson plans that are relevant to the country/area must be available.
- There must be appropriate evaluation instruments which are suitable for the unique quality of media education.
- The state can encourage media literacy education in schools through grants for programs, various projects and resources.

Teaching hints for educators[12]

- Media education must be implemented by teachers who often have great autonomy in how much media literacy education they carry out in class. Therefore educators have to take initiative and actively promote media literacy education.
- Since media education involves such a diversity of skills and expertise, there must be a collaboration between teachers, parents, researchers and media professionals.
- In the classroom media analysis should consist of class discussions and reflection that are the basis for constructing new knowledge and in which meanings are negotiated. Media education should be inquiry-centred, co-investigative, egalitarian and dialogic. Students should develop critical autonomy and be able to make independent judgements on media texts.
- As an educator encourage in-depth study through comparing the extensive media coverage of a major media event or new trends in media such as the 'reality television' phenomenon. Use plenty of surveys to find out what students already know about the media.
- Also include media production in your lessons. Do not only analyse or criticise media, but do some practical work on media. Good equipment is desirable but not essential. Constructing different media messages can also be done at little cost.

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[9] For an overview of media education in secondary education in European countries see Hart and Süss (1999).
[10] Experts' opinions are taken from Pungente (n.year) and Duncan (2001)
[11] See also Pungente (n.year)
[12] See also Duncan (2001)

- When constructing and deconstructing media messages specifically take into account the following, as they are often neglected:

  i.) Audience: how each of us makes sense of any media text on the basis of our gender, culture , race, and our individual and collective needs.

  ii.) Institutions: focus on concerns about social, cultural and political relations.

  iii.) Industry: including critical topics such as ownership and control, the impact of transnational corporations and the global economy or cross media merchandising. Help students investigate monopolies, the extent of corporate resources for advertising and the incredibly powerful role of public relations' initiatives.

- Do not only approach media education from a protectionist point of view. There might be problematic media consumption. Still, media education should not only judge the pleasure one can have with media. Teachers should begin by acknowledging their own problematic and contradictory culture passions and be prepared, when appropriate, to share them.

- Teach not only 'through' but also 'about' the media. Talk about media critically and be open about political issues that may implicitly influence the media messages. The media classroom deserves openness, intellectual rigor, enthusiasm and a willingness to take risks.

- Encourage searching for different opinions and statements aside from mainstream media. Use concrete topics to demonstrate how the dominant media are able to manufacture consent. Try to encourage students to transfer their insights gathered in classroom into other areas of everyday life: the politics of schooling, the role of authority in the family, the world of work. Explore alternatives to mainstream media. Look for media books and periodicals offering alternatives to mainstream media coverage. As well, you might want to consider novels with media themes as a stimulating classroom resource.

- Try to stay up to date! Constantly changes occur concerning media, especially new media. To stay relevant, media education must address comprehensively the new and converging communication technologies, from multimedia to the Internet. New media also have different forms of media language as opposed to traditional media.

- Get in contact with other teachers! Educators need to keep up with this constantly changing field and share ideas with colleagues.

4. Summary

This guideline, aimed mainly at educators, should give an introduction to media literacy and media education. Why is being a media literate person important in today's world? Many media are being used actively or consumed passively by children and adults every day, but we have not always learnt how to deal with this amount of information. Often, we are influenced by media more than one might think.

As this guideline indicates, there is no single definition of media literacy. The concept of media literacy includes various dimensions. One should be able to get access to media content and should be able to analyse, critically reflect upon and interpret various media messages. In addition one should also be competent in creating media content.

Continuing concerns about possible negative influences of media, especially mass media, have made the need for media literacy education all the more evident in recent years. To know how media systems work and to think critically are essential skills for all EU citizens. Policymakers should commit to making media literacy an essential part of every young person's education. Many countries already have introduced some legislation on media education in school curricula, often being an interdisciplinary issue in all school subjects. Apart from relevant legislation other basic framework conditions that are essential for a successful media literacy education include the training of teachers in media literacy at universities and beyond and the creation of suitable textbooks and other teaching resources.

Students should learn how to deconstruct media messages, taking into account that media construct our realities. The creation of media content being one dimension of media literacy, education should not only include deconstruction but also construction of media messages. Often teachers can determine within limits how much media education they carry out in their classes. As a consequence the most important ingredient for an effective media literacy education in schools are committed teachers. They can not only make media education a success but also further promote media literacy in our society.

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