Media literacy in Europe | Controversies, Challenges and Perspectives

The three preparatory EuroMeduc seminars and the European Congress which took place in Bologna (Italy) from 21st to 24th October 2009, emphasised the wealth, diversity and vitality of media literacy in Europe. They also enabled hundreds of researchers and practitioners to network, while bringing together the media industry and policy-makers. Thanks to contributions from a large panel of experts, the present published piece provides an account of this work, and the recommendations they have come up with. Approaches, at times dissimilar, yet always complementary, were uncovered, emphasising the need for this issue to be adapted continuously to the rapid evolution within the media and within societies.

Prefaced by Viviane Reding —European Commissioner for Information, Society and Media.

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Media literacy is a paramount goal of the EU’s public policy

Digital technologies have made media truly ubiquitous. Whether originated in established publishers or created by users, media content permeates and informs every aspect of our life.

Yet, in order to make the most of the wealth of content available to them, people need to be able to make out what they wish from what they don’t, what is suitable from what isn’t. They need a chart and a compass to reap the rewards and fight off the risks of navigating an ocean which looks alluring and forbidding at the same time.

This is where media literacy comes into play. The challenge is daunting. Target constituencies keep growing and moving as “digital migrants” try to catch up with “digital natives”, as unfettered creativity seems to give media content new shapes or take it along new paths almost everyday. However tall the order might be, media literacy is a paramount goal of public policy if all European citizens are to enjoy the benefits of the Information Society fully.

The European Commission views the topic of media literacy as of great importance having adopted a Recommendation on media literacy on 20 August 2009 setting out a number of goals in this area for the Member States and the Media Industry.

Furthermore, a reporting obligation was introduced in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, and the Commission has launched a study to develop criteria for assessing media literacy levels. The final report will be presented in autumn 2009.

This background explains why the debates that took place on October 21-24 in Bellaria under the auspices of EuroMeduc are so important. The attached proceedings reflect the breadth and depth of the thinking process that has been at work to redesign the media literacy of the 21st century and to provide it with the most effective tools. In this respect, I am happy to see that the empowerment made possible by the so-called participatory Web is now fully integrated so as to make the education core of media literacy even more meaningful.
I would like to commend all contributors to EuroMeduc on a job well done. They should rest assured that their voice will be heard and that the recommendations that came out of the Bellaria congress will not be left unattended.

**Viviane Reding | EU Commissioner for Information Society and Media**
At a time when the media are making their presence felt as an essential component of our contemporary societies, media literacy is becoming a major issue in the field of education. In recent years, it has been the subject of various initiatives —local, national, or transnational— in an increasing number of European countries. Several legislative projects or large-scale programmes are in the study phase. Recently, the European Commission, with the support of the European Parliament, made it a priority by drafting a number of recommendations aimed at Member States. These are part of the aftermath of European research and applied research projects, jointly financed within the framework of programmes such as E-learning and Safer Internet (Educaunet, Mediappro, Media Educ, EMECE, Allmedia, Log in the media…). Structured networks are already in operation (Euromedialiteracy, Mentor, etc.). However, the players involved lack transverse mechanisms for the exchange, distribution and exploitation of their results.

EuroMeduc’s objective is to offer this mechanism, with the support of the European Commission, as part of the “Lifelong Learning Programme”, for a period of eighteen months. This project brought together practitioners and researchers specialising in media literacy, promoting in particular small educational structures developing on-the-ground expertise. In this way, it aimed to increase the quality and relevance of education projects by supplying existing networks with the results obtained and by developing more structured and intensive practices for exchange. It also sought to identify restraints and opportunities, as well as initiatives to be undertaken, and, from there, to produce recommendations with an educational, scientific and political impact.
For this purpose, the EuroMeduc project was made available in three successive constituents:

• A series of three seminars run by groups of experts. Each of these seminars dealt with a strategic question: media literacy using the mechanisms for media productions by young people both at school and outside school (Paris, 2008), lifelong media literacy: innovative practices in the world outside school (Brussels, 2008) and media literacy and the appropriation of the Internet by young people (Faro, 2009). These questions are summarised in three contributions reprinted in this publication.

• A European conference on media literacy (Bellaria, 2009) bringing together practitioners, researchers and media literacy professionals, as well as managers from the fields of education and politics, representatives of European institutions and players from the media industry. The major themes tackled during the conference are covered in the various contributions to this work. The conference led to some recommendations, which are reproduced at the end of this volume.

• A number of publications following on from the three seminars and the conference. These are accessible at the website www.euromeduc.eu. This work closes this third constituent.

By means of these three constituents, the four partners in the EuroMeduc project, along with all those who took part in the seminars and the conference, wished to support the effective and integrated development of media literacy, and to contribute to its implementation and widespread application in Europe.
The future
Media literacy education is currently at a point of transition. It is a point of opportunity, certainly; but it is also one of risk and danger. It is a point at which we need to be very clear about our aims and priorities —because if we are not clear about where we are going, we are very likely to lose our way.

As my title suggests, the challenges here are partly about technology —but only partly. There is a good deal of loose talk about the promise and impact of technology; and this is particularly the case when we talk about young people —the so-called “digital natives” we hear so much about. Yet technological change is always also about cultural, social, economic and political change. Current changes in the media environment are not just about technology, but also about how identities are formed and lived out in modern societies. So in talking about technology, we need to be careful that we do not accord it an all-determining power.

In fact, my primary focus here is on policy. I will be concentrating mainly on policy at the European level —although I will take an occasional detour into the situation in the UK. I want to look at two key areas, which have so far been developing rather in parallel: media literacy and digital literacy. They share the term literacy, and to that extent there are some obvious connections between them —although, as in many other areas, the notion of “literacy” is often rather loosely applied here. In fact, these two policy initiatives seem to have come...
from rather different directions, and to have rather different concerns and aims. While there are some good reasons for bringing them together, this is also likely to entail some difficulties and challenges.

I have been involved in various ways in policy initiatives in both of these areas; and although I am critical in some respects, it is not my intention to attack the individuals who have been responsible for them. To paraphrase an old German philosopher, policy-makers make policy in conditions that are not of their own choosing. I want to read policy not as the expression of individuals, but as symptomatic of broader social, economic and political trends — and indeed of some of the contradictory tendencies that are at work.

**Media literacy policy**

Let us begin with media literacy. Here is a recent quotation from no less a person than Viviane Reding, the European Commission’s Information Society and Media Commissioner:

*In a digital era, media literacy is crucial for achieving full and active citizenship… The ability to read and write — or traditional literacy — is no longer sufficient in this day and age… Everyone (old and young) needs to get to grips with the new digital world in which we live. For this, continuous information and education is more important than regulation*.  

It is interesting to note the emphasis here on digital media — and also that information and education seem to be set up in opposition to regulation, or at least as an alternative to it. I shall return to this issue below.

At the European level, there have been many signs that media literacy is becoming a priority for policy-makers. There is mention of media literacy in the key document, the European Audiovisual Services Directive (2007); and over the past couple of years, the Commission has been moving steadily towards the formulation of a binding policy on media literacy. There was an official “communication” on media literacy in late 2007; followed in 2008 by a study of current trends in the field; and a “recommendation” in Summer 2009. The latter is entitled the “recommendation on media literacy in the digital environment for a more competitive audiovisual and content industry and an inclusive knowledge society”. The move from a communication to a recommendation is a sign that progress is being made — and that pressure will eventually be exerted on national governments as well.

However, the rather incoherent title of the recommendation flags up a problem. In this document, and in other similar texts — for example, the Commission’s study of Current Trends and Approaches to Media Literacy, published last year — one can find a vast range of ideas about what media literacy is. Among other things, media literacy seems to involve:

- Developing skills in handling technology;
- Encouraging appreciation of the European audio-visual heritage (albeit one which is typically identified only with the cinema);

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1. Quoted in press release: Media literacy: do people really understand how to make the most of blogs, search engines or interactive TV?  

2. Information on these developments can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/index_en.htm.
• Protecting children against harmful content, and developing their awareness of online risk;
• Promoting the inclusion of hitherto excluded groups in using technology, and in the “knowledge society”;
• Promoting independent public service media;
• Enabling people to resist commercial persuasion, and raising awareness of new marketing practices;
• Encouraging active citizenship and participation in civil society;
• Promoting creative and artistic self-expression through the use of new media, and enabling people to communicate with audiences;
• Delivering the subject curriculum in more exciting and relevant ways for “twenty-first century learners”;
• Promoting equality of opportunity, tolerance and diversity —and even Human rights;
• Encouraging the development of a globally competitive European media content industry;
• Helping people to make informed economic decisions as media consumers;
• Training workers (or developing “human capital”) for the emerging media and technology industries of the “knowledge economy”.

Media literacy, it seems, is a skill or a form of competency; but it is also about critical thinking, and about cultural dispositions or tastes. It is about old media and new media, about books and mobile phones. It is for young and old, for teachers and parents, for people who work in the media industries and for NGOs. It happens in schools and in homes, and indeed in the media themselves. It is an initiative coming from the top down, but also from the bottom up. In these kinds of texts, media literacy is also often aligned with other contemporary “buzzwords” in educational and social policy. It is about creativity, citizenship, empowerment, inclusion, personalisation, innovation, critical thinking… and the list goes on.

On one level, this is all good. None of us would be likely to argue for exclusion or uncritical thinking or disempowerment —or, for that matter, media illiteracy. But therein lies the problem. As the Americans would say, this is all motherhood and apple pie. Or, to be even more cynical, it is a form of policy marketing-speak: it is about selling media literacy on the back of a whole series of other desirable commodities.

Having been involved in these initiatives myself, I recognise the need for precisely this kind of marketing. We are competing with other people with very different priorities and imperatives, making very different kinds of claims. We need to get ourselves noticed; and so we need to be making an urgent and enticing offer. However, as we do this, we also recognise that it must entail compromises; and it can require a strategic refusal to define what it is we really mean —because if we say what we mean, then we run the risk that some people might not agree with us. In some circumstances, this can mean offering hostages to fortune —making claims that we know to be false or inflated and that we know we cannot possibly deliver. And in some circumstances, this confusion can represent a potentially fatal mistake.

The Commission’s study of Current Trends and Approaches is quite explicit about the problems this can cause. However, it seems to believe that this can be resolved by yet more
authoritative policy documents that will somehow settle the matter once and for all — as if the tablets of stone defining media literacy and laying down the criteria for assessing it will come down from on high and finally tell us all what to think. Personally, I doubt that.

Why media literacy now?

Why has media literacy risen up the policy agenda in the last five years or so? After all, some of us have been making this argument for twenty or thirty years — and for much of that time it seems to have been falling on deaf ears. Why has it suddenly become so prominent now?

We can find some clues to that by looking at the situation in the UK. In 2003, we had a new Communications Act that (among other things) created the new regulatory body Ofcom, the Office of Communications. Surprisingly for many people, Ofcom was charged with the responsibility to “promote media literacy” — something that had never been seen as a government priority before. Ofcom’s definition of media literacy — “the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts” — has been widely adopted internationally.

Ofcom has sometimes been termed a “super-regulator”, in that it brought together the regulation of broadcasting and of telecommunications — itself of course a sign of changing technological times. Yet in fact the Communications Act was largely about deregulation — about reducing governmental regulation of media, and handing greater power over to market forces. So, it removed obstacles to cross-media ownership, and to global media companies operating in the UK market. Ofcom’s role is primarily as an economic regulator, a regulator of the market, rather than a content regulator.

In this context, it would be possible to interpret media literacy as a familiar neo-liberal strategy. 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. What does it matter if Rupert Murdoch owns the media, if we are all wise and critical consumers? And so media literacy becomes part of a strategy of creating well-behaved, self-regulating “citizen-consumers” (to use Ofcom’s term); 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. It has become the duty of all good consumers — and, when it comes to children, of all good parents — to regulate their own media uses.

Even so, those of us who have been pushing for media literacy for many years have seen this as a great opportunity. We have found ourselves in the unusual position of being able to inform, if not shape, the development of policy — although it should be noted that media literacy has largely remained a concern for media regulators, and has yet to make significant headway in terms of educational policy. Furthermore, five years on from the creation of Ofcom, the climate is starting to change in some respects: media literacy is actually slipping down the policy agenda, or at least being reformulated, for reasons I shall explain below.

**Digital literacy policy**

The term “digital literacy” seems to have appeared on the policy agenda even more recently, although in fact it is far from new: one can look back 15 or 20 years to arguments about “computer literacy”, and even before that to debates about “information literacy”. In the past year, the European Commission has published a Working Paper on Digital Literacy, along with the Recommendations of a High-Level Expert Group (of which I was a member). It has funded research and development projects; and it has also commissioned a very thoughtful and comprehensive study of digital literacy initiatives by the Danish Technological Institute.

It is important to recognise that this initiative starts from somewhere rather different. If media literacy is essentially a regulatory initiative, digital literacy is primarily about inclusion. The challenge here — at least as governments see it — is to ensure that everyone is part of the so-called “knowledge economy”, or the “information society”. In terms of Ofcom’s three-part definition, the key issue here is essentially one of access rather than understanding or creation. The aim is to overcome the obstacles to participation, and ensure that everyone has the skills they need to use technology effectively. In the documents, digital literacy is frequently defined as a “life skill” — a form of individual technological competence that is a prerequisite for full participation in society. If you lack the skills, you are by definition disadvantaged; and the key aim for policy is to ensure that those who are most disadvantaged are brought up to speed. That includes those who are socially disadvantaged in other ways, to do with class or gender for example, as well as the elderly and the disabled.

Participation is clearly seen here as a good thing in itself — although it is often rather loosely defined. In practice, participation seems to be largely confined to basic functions such as accessing e-government, job seeking, finding health information, online training, paying your taxes, and of course shopping. It stops quite a long way short of the kinds of democratic participation that some of the more enthusiastic proponents of digital activism find so exciting. The skills that are involved here are also essentially functional or operational — “how-to” skills.

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There are levels of skill, but even the higher levels seem to be primarily about being able to operate more complex equipment or applications, or more intensive forms of use. So, for example, at level 1, you are able to plug in your computer; at level 2 you can complete your income tax return online; while at level 3 you can edit your videos and upload them to YouTube (where Google will then own them in perpetuity). This is perhaps best epitomised in the ICT “driving test”, which is often taken to be synonymous with digital literacy.

Although there is occasionally some mention here of the ability to evaluate online information, the approach is generally a very limited one — it is about checking sources, and distinguishing between fact and opinion, as though this were simply a straightforward, mechanical process. The central focus is on retrieving information, rather than evaluating it — as though information was simply a neutral good, waiting to be collected. Indeed, the notion of information itself is absolutely central here. The fact that much of what people do online or with digital technology is not really about information at all seems to be largely ignored. The image of the ideal user here seems to be that of the responsible and efficient information-seeker. It is an image that contrasts quite strikingly with what young people mostly do with technology, which is largely about accessing entertainment content, chatting with friends, or playing games — or indeed with downloading TV, movies and music.

There seems to be an implicit assumption here that using technology is essentially and inherently beneficial — at least once we have dealt with some of those troublesome issues about privacy and safety. Technology is somehow inherently empowering: if only we can persuade people to use it, it will automatically promote innovation, creativity, learning and social harmony. People are excluded because they lack technological skills: once they acquire those skills, they will be automatically included. So the more people use technology, the more digital literacy there will be — and indeed, in a circular way, the use of technology is in itself seen as a measure of people’s digital literacy. (This is a peculiar assumption, for example when compared with television: do we assume that people who watch more television, or have access to more television channels, are more media literate than those who watch less?)

The issue of measurement is particularly critical here — and for public bodies spending the taxpayer’s money, that is entirely understandable. But when we measure digital literacy (or indeed media literacy), what are we measuring? To come back to the UK, Ofcom undertakes an annual media literacy audit, which like most of its other research is commissioned from a market research company. The media literacy audit is designed to serve as a kind of benchmark: when the government wants to know how effective Ofcom has been in its duty of promoting media literacy, Ofcom needs to be able to show it some numbers. But what is being measured here, and in the digital literacy reports, is almost entirely about access and about functional or operational skills. How frequently do people go online? How many functions do they use on their mobile phone? How efficient are their online search skills?  

7. Reports from the Media Literacy Audit can be found at: www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/ml_audit/
This is not to suggest that such technical skills are unimportant. Nor is it to imply that the broader objective of inclusion is one to be rejected — on the contrary. Despite the technocratic view that is apparent here, the policy documents are by no means naïve about this. Digital exclusion is not seen as a simple or straightforward matter, in which people are either “in” or “out”. The use of technology is understood in relation to the social contexts in which it is used, and the motivations and purposes people have in using it. There is a suitably complex view of the role of intermediaries and organisations, and a recognition of people’s different approaches and needs in terms of learning. Yet ultimately, digital literacy seems much more narrowly defined, and much more instrumental, than the rather grandiose aspirations that characterise discussions of media literacy. It has very different objectives, and a very different view of media or technology — and of what people need to learn about it.

Coming together

So what might be the grounds for combining media literacy and digital literacy? This is a suggestion that is made quite explicitly in the Recommendations of the High-Level Expert Group on Digital Literacy — and on one level, it might be seen as quite politically expedient. In increasing numbers of countries across Europe, ICT enjoys a level of governmental endorsement and commercial support that media literacy has never achieved — and indeed will never achieve. The reason for this is partly because technology is seen to offer a magical solution to social problems — and this is true of many areas besides education. However, it is also because commercial technology companies see schools as a significant market opportunity. We have seen a massive, unprecedented level of investment in digital technology in schools; and this has been possible because of the comprehensive penetration of schools and educational policy-making by business interests.

Indeed, in some ways, we might be forgiven for thinking that ICT has simply overtaken us. We are still insisting on the importance of media literacy, while ICT is being relentlessly pushed into schools whether they like it or not — and indeed with very little evidence that it improves the quality of learning, or even represents good value for money when compared with other approaches. We need to be very wary — and indeed overtly critical — of much of this; but in political terms, it represents an opportunity that we cannot afford to pass up.

However, there are some good reasons for combining media literacy and digital literacy that go beyond mere political expediency. The most obvious of these is about convergence. I would argue that information and communication technologies should really be seen as forms of media: in fact many people refer to them as simply “new media” — although the distinction between old and new is not always helpful either. Digital resources — websites, computer games, online environments — mediate the world, just like books and films and TV: they are media. Likewise, the distinction between digital and non-digital technologies is fairly insignificant. Most media — even books and newspapers — involve the use of digital technologies at some point, either in their production or in their distribution or consumption.

8. For further discussion, see my Beyond Technology.
Media increasingly combine different modes of communication, and operate across many technological platforms. To this extent, there would seem to be very little logic for separating these things.

Indeed, media education is in a position to provide a more extended approach to critical literacy here. Rather than checklists for distinguishing between fact and opinion, which is the digital literacy approach, media literacy offers a much more comprehensive set of conceptual and critical tools. I have written elsewhere about how those tools might usefully be applied to analysing digital media like websites or computer games9.

At the same time, media literacy has something to learn here from digital literacy. Although the digital literacy agenda is narrower in some respects, it does help to move media literacy towards a more socially inclusive approach; it puts issues to do with civic participation and citizenship more strongly on the agenda. It also forces us to think more about lifelong learning, rather than just about children and young people; and about contexts other than schools. There is always a danger that critical media analysis will end up simply reinforcing a kind of superficial cynicism — a view of the media as somehow just purveyors of lies and propaganda. That kind of view is very easy for students to slip into — particularly middle-class teenagers, I would suggest; and it is one that can end up rationalising a kind of apathy10. The argument about digital literacy takes media literacy away from a focus just on critical analysis and towards the possibility of social action. New technology offers the potential for students to speak to audiences beyond the classroom; and for media educators to engage with their community, and to intervene, in new ways.

There are also good reasons to do with learning and teaching. Those of us who are old enough to remember the trials of analogue media making in schools have good reason to feel excited about the new opportunities for creative media-making that are being offered here. This is partly just about accessibility — about cheapness and ease of use; but it also has benefits in terms of learning. The most exciting promise here is not just about people having more opportunities to make their own media. It is also to do with bringing theory (or critical analysis) closer to practice (or media making) — and these are two dimensions of media education that have often been seen as quite separate. Digital video editing, for example, makes explicit the kinds of choices we have to make as we select and combine images into sequences, and then add sounds and music; and in that sense, it can allow for a kind of critical practice, or practical critique. Of course, it does not always do so — and there are many instances of quite unthinking or at least haphazard uses of digital editing. But in the right pedagogical context, with the right questions being asked, technology offers possibilities for a different, more challenging, kind of critical practice11.

11. For some examples of this kind of classroom work, see Burn Andrew, Making New Media: Creative Production and Digital Literacies, New York: Peter Lang, 2009.
Reasons to beware

So there are some good educational reasons for media educators to engage with digital literacy; and some politically expedient reasons as well. But there are also some very good reasons to be careful. The first, and most crucial, is that we run the risk of resurrecting an old and well-established confusion between teaching about media and teaching through media. This is a confusion I encounter when I go into schools and people assure me that they do a lot of media education — and then proceed to show me their computer suite as evidence of this. It is a confusion that is apparent when people talk about “twenty-first century literacy” — and seem in fact to mean that they are using computers (or even films) as a way of teaching reading and writing.

The risk here is that we are using media merely as a delivery system — a teaching aid — or even simply as a means of motivating children to learn something that we think is more important. Media become the vehicle, the means or the pretext for other kinds of learning that are really nothing to do with the media themselves. This is fair enough in its own right, but it is not media education. Media education is not the same thing as educational media. In this respect, the use of the word literacy can be quite profoundly confusing: developing media literacy is not the same thing as using media to develop print literacy. Teaching through media and teaching about media are not necessarily or inherently incompatible. But the danger here is that media come to be used in functional or instrumental ways — that the critical questions we ask as media educators (about who creates media and why they do so, about how media represent the world, and how they work) tend to be marginalised or ignored.

My second concern here is that many adults are somehow intimidated by the arguments around technology — and seem to be particularly likely to buy into the popular mythology of the “digital generation”. The idea that children today are “growing up digital” — that they are “digital natives” while we are just “digital immigrants” — is born of a kind of fear. Children, according to this view, already spontaneously know everything they need to know about these technologies. Adults, on the other hand, are engaged in a pathetic struggle to catch up. This kind of argument is routinely rehearsed in public policy debates; and yet there is very little evidence to support it. Old media, especially television and popular music, are still central to most young people’s lives; and the idea that they are somehow naturally skilled and knowledgeable in their dealings with new technology is very questionable. This kind of argument overstates and misunderstands the differences between generations, and plays into a prevalent sentimentality about childhood12.

This can also be the case for media educators, who are sometimes seduced by the ease of using technology, and the very polished and professional-looking results that students can achieve.

For some, the critical edge of media education seems to be losing out to the wonders of creative media-making: all that close critical analysis—all that boring discussion and writing—is just so much less exciting and sexy than pushing images around on a screen. Of course, it is vital to recognise the creative potential of digital media; but it is important to insist that media education is not about making media for its own sake. Here again, there is a risk that the productive and creative aspects of media literacy will become disconnected from the key objective of critical understanding.

My third concern is around the participatory potential of so-called social software or “Web 2.0” —blogs, wikis, user-generated content, video-and photo-sharing, citizen journalism, and so on. For some, these developments seem to represent a fundamental cultural shift, away from a situation where the media were controlled by powerful elites, to one in which control is now in the hands of ordinary people. However, in the wave of enthusiasm about the imminent total democratisation of the media, several questions seem to have been ignored. If we look at who is engaging in these participatory activities, we find that it is largely the “usual suspects”—those who are already privileged in other areas of their lives, in terms of economic or educational capital. Indeed, the danger here is that technology may simply accentuate existing social inequalities rather than helping to overcome them. We must also not forget that many of these developments are driven by commercial interests, and indeed by a small number of increasingly powerful global media companies. The apparently participatory possibilities of new media make it a much more effective means of targeting consumers, and gathering information about them; and this is why advertisers and marketers are now starting to spend more and more of their money in the digital realm. Here again, it is vital that we keep asking the “old” critical questions about media, rather than sliding off into a kind of technological euphoria.

Shifting ground

Thus, while there are some good reasons to welcome the combination of media literacy and digital literacy, there are some equally good reasons to be wary about it. We also need to be alert to potential changes in the policy climate. In the UK at least, one can detect signs that policy makers are starting to shift away from media literacy and towards a narrower focus on digital literacy. I can provide two very recent instances of this.

In July 2009, the UK government published a review of the primary school curriculum, which is likely to set the agenda for significant reform in the future. There is a great deal to be said about this, of course; but one very striking thing is how it appears to be opting for digital literacy rather than media literacy.


14. This can be found at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/primarycurriculumreview/
In almost 200 pages, the document makes 72 references to ICT, and precisely none to television — despite the fact that watching television is still by far primary school children’s major leisure-time pursuit. This suggests to me that the problem for policymakers is not to do with technology, but with popular culture. They are happy to buy into a technocratic rhetoric about the transformative power of technology; but they still find it very hard to address the realities of most children’s everyday lives.

My second example is from cultural policy, rather than educational policy. Also in the summer of 2009, the government published its “Digital Britain” report, which makes a comprehensive set of proposals for bringing the UK into the digital age15. This is very much a technocratic document: it is about using technology to promote Britain’s economic competitiveness, to create a skilled workforce, and to engage with the “information revolution”. Here the shift from media literacy to digital literacy is very explicit. The report says that media literacy is ill-defined and fragmented (and it may well be right about that); and it argues that there should be a move away from media literacy towards what it calls “digital participation”. It proposes a National Plan for Digital Participation that looks set to replace media literacy on the policy agenda. This approach also seems to have some endorsement from Ofcom — although Ofcom’s role is likely to be much reduced after the coming election. This view of media literacy as digital participation is also one that the media industries find much more palatable. For example, broadcasters have always been less than happy with the idea of people studying or critically analysing what they do; whereas the idea of giving them some limited hands-on experience of media production is the kind of token gesture they seem to find much more comfortable. In both these cases, there are signs that digital literacy (or “digital participation”) may be coming to replace media literacy, rather than combining with it.

**What next?**

How might media educators respond in this situation? Do we need, as some of the policy documents imply, some kind of common European framework for media literacy? Do we need checklists, benchmarks and indicators that will enable us to assess and compare levels of media literacy? Do we really need more policy documents?

The European Commission’s state-of-the-art report on Current Trends and Approaches certainly seemed to think so. I would agree with its recommendations that we need more teacher training, better quality teaching materials, opportunities for students to engage in production, and more critical evaluation and research. But it also proposed many more recommendations, about quality standards for media content, the involvement of regulators, citizens’ forums, measures to protect the audio-visual heritage, pan-European networks, public awareness campaigns, and so on. While there is a good deal we might find to support in such a list, it is nevertheless much too diffuse.

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15. This can be found at: www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/broadcasting/6216.aspx. The key discussion of media literacy and digital participation is on pages 39-41.
In my view, there is now an urgent need to sharpen our arguments, and to focus our energies. There is a risk of media literacy being dispersed in a haze of digital technological rhetoric. There is a danger of it becoming far too vague and generalised and poorly defined—a matter of good intentions and warm feelings, but very little actually getting done. We can end up with lots of networking and dialogue, but no actual substance—a great deal of participation, but little action, and no significant change.

Although I do not have a recipe or a magic solution, I do believe that schools should remain absolutely central to what we are doing, if only because that is where all young people compulsorily spend so much of their time. The school is the key public sector institution that ought to support the rights and actions of citizens; and despite the predictions of some technological enthusiasts, it is not going to disappear any time soon.

I believe we have good reason to congratulate ourselves on what has been achieved in media literacy education; but we also need to evaluate it, and we must have the courage to be critical of it too. We need to engage with regulators, media companies and politicians—but we should be doing so from a position of strength, where we are clear about our own aims and priorities.

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Rethinking media & digital literacy policies: a critical stance

The future of media literacy in the digital age constitutes a major issue for all those who are involved in media education. It opens up new questions, re-opens old ones and requires answers from scholars, policy makers and practitioners. As is always the case when education is at stake, these questions blur the boundaries of science, ethics, politics and even ideology. As a consequence, thinking, reflecting and outlining the future of media literacy in the digital age goes far beyond technicalities, skills and “know how” matters. The approaches to literacy and education in the digital age both reflect and build a (shared?) “culture of education” (Bruner, 1996). Beyond statements and practices concerning media education and digital literacy there are implicit and profoundly cultural images of “children”, “citizens”, and “society”, there are folk theories of learning, social ideas of “intelligence”, and common assumptions about what is suitable and what is not. Briefly, there are beliefs and values, political horizons and ethical stances.

This is the reason why we need to carefully analyse emerging turns in education.

* This paper is based on a presentation at the Second European Congress on Media Literacy, Bellaria, Italy, 21-24 October 2009 where I was asked to reply and comment on David Buckingham’s keynote conference.
As David Buckingham illustrates (see D. Buckingham’s chapter in this volume), taking a critical perspective on contemporary enthusiasm toward media and digital literacy is of paramount interest since, when educational changes involve technologies, the attention focuses more on the artefacts and their opportunities as learning tools than on the cultures and ideologies at play. I use the term “critical” in its philosophical meaning where “critical approach” does not mean or imply a negative evaluation. It rather means a reflective, thoughtful approach aimed at questioning what we are used to take for granted at least on a mundane basis.

The issue raised in Buckingham’s chapter is not “should we promote media and digital empowerment?” Of course we should. The crucial point is rather an analytical one: we should think and recurrently rethink about the implicit and, I would say, even ideological premises of this enthusiasm, even if we agree with those premises and perhaps all the more so as we agree with such premises.

There is no educational practice, no educational policy or educational shift — such as the contemporary shift to digital and even mobile in education — that is value-free. David Buckingham reminds us that our first task is to enlighten this value-dependent nature of our choices and the policies and practices we endorse.

However the way he constructs his proposal is particularly relevant.

We all have been trained to take a cultural analytical approach to media texts and media discourses. We all have been trained to analyse media as texts finding out the said and the unsaid, the explicit as well as the implicit meanings and cultural premises. David Buckingham applies a “cultural approach” to our own statements in media education. In this chapter he sees and treats policy statements, programs, and regulation as texts: as any other texts, those include front-end topics as well as undercurrents. Treating statements on media & digital literacy as texts, he submits them to a kind of semiotic analysis to uncover possible under-texts, unstated implications and premises.

It is as if he warned us against being naïve in these matters. Actually the issue he raises is not whether or not we should adhere to these statements or policies in media education. Rather the central point of David Buckingham’s chapter is to invite us to critically analyse these statements as we would of media discourses and media texts.

His proposals call and even summon us to always keep a certain critical distance toward our own statements, our own pedagogical beliefs and certainties. Certainties even when anchored to some scientific knowledge are dangerous things, dangerous in the sense that we need to treat them very, very carefully. I would even say that we should never completely adhere to what we think is “real” or “true” or even “the right thing to do”. I think that this epistemic distance is what makes the difference between a scientific approach to reality and a system of beliefs: in some sense sciences are systems of beliefs we believe in... to a certain point. I think that this epistemic shift from media education to the premises the statements on media education are rooted on, is a crucial move if we want to enlighten the implicit culture of education these statements and educational policies both reflect and contribute in creating.

Providing citizens with access, available information and how-to-do digital skills: is this enough?

The second point I would like to reflect upon refers to what is — according to Buckingham — the core issue of present political fad for digital literacy.
He says that from the government’s point of view “the challenge is to ensure that everyone is part of the so-called knowledge economy” and access lies at the core of the whole affair. The skills that are involved “are essentially functional and operational” and may be conceived as “how-to-do skills”. Current claims on digital literacy focus “on retrieving information rather than evaluating it as though information was simply a neutral good and as if distinguishing between facts and opinions was a simply mechanical process”.

The whole discourse on digital empowerment — so well analyzed by David Buckingham — seems to completely delete, hide, and conceal some crucial dimensions of people’s life-world such as trust and credibility. To argue this point, I would refer to a recent debate about mobile health communication I participated in.

I had the chance to recently attend a conference on “Mobile Communication and Social Policies” held at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. And I had an interesting exchange with an eminent colleague who works in the field of Health Communication. He and his research group are carrying on a major applied research project whose main goal is to find ways to allow all American citizens to be able to access relevant medical and health information when they need it. More accurately, the main research question underlying this project was: “How can we reach patients and relatives where they are, and provide them with the relevant information they need?”

For these researchers, mobile communication and information devices as well as wireless access to the web seemed to be an affordable answer. The basic idea of the whole project is to design a system of Mobile Health Communication likely to secure access to relevant medical information to all whenever they need. Great, isn’t it?

During the workshop, I couldn’t resist asking a very naive question: what about credibility, what about trust and confidence? What about the well-known process that explains the placebo effect by which medical information is not relevant per se, it is and becomes relevant for me because it is you giving me that information. And “you” here stands for “my doctor”, a specific individual whom I trust and who is singled out from the whole health system whether it is digitalized or not.

Beyond information lies what many years ago Lacan called the sujet supposé savoir: the knowing subject, someone we trust for the sake of the transfer or of other kinds of contrat de confiance.

Information of course is relevant with respect to the source and this may become a typical digital literacy issue: we can teach and learn how to recognize the sources of information, how to distinguish among reliable sources and unreliable, how to compare and evaluate them. Yet information is relevant not only with respect to the source but also with respect to the individual’s confidence in the source and to his or her adhesion to the source. Information becomes relevant depending on who we perceive as the authoritative voice which validates reality. And this is a totally different process.

On that occasion, the colleague explained to me that they were totally aware that the question of credibility was a crucial point of the whole project.

As David Buckingham said, facts and opinions and —me adding— relevant and irrelevant information are not as distinguishable as we imagine or as we would like them to be. Information, even the most sophisticated and exhaustive or the most recipient-designed one does not make sense on its own.
As David Buckingham points out, empowering people, providing them with access and
digital skills is but the starting point. It is a necessary albeit by no means sufficient condition.
And if we put all our energies on this, we may cultivate the illusion that we achieved all what
is expected from us. I would conclude this point on this observation: having access to the
best national libraries in the world has never, never mechanically produced “beautiful minds”
or healthy people.

When culture frames practices, differences often surface: Technology and the cultures of education at stake

The third point I wish to comment is related to one of the Buckingham’s chapter opening
statements:

“Technological change is always also about cultural, social, economic
and political change. Current changes in the media environment are not
just about technology, but also about how identities are formed and lived
out in modern societies. So in talking about technology, we need to be
careful that we do not accord it an all-determining power.”

These “pay attention” remarks and a certain suspicion about the idea that the technologies
are mere tools, a neutral system of utilities that can be displaced from one context or life-world
to another sound very familiar to me. Perhaps not surprisingly (esprit du temps?) they are the
same that guided an exploratory study I conducted with Dr. André H. Caron [University of
Montreal] on the myths underlying the adoption and appropriation of mobile digital players
as learning tools in university courses (Caron, Caronia & Weiss-Lambrou, 2007; Caronia,
& Caron, 2009). The results of this study faithfully echo David Buckingham’s statement and
buttress it with some empirical evidence.

I do not intend by any means to report the whole study here. Just a few observations. In
designing this study we assumed that technologies were not mere tools provided only with
functions and utilities. Technologies carry praxis and have symbolic functions and meanings.
Their use and even definition is always cultural, that is to say it is mediated by the cultural
frames of reference the users live by.

So our main research questions were: which culture or education underlies the adoption
of mobile learning devices by the institution? What are the professional systems of beliefs,
theories of learning, concepts of knowledge and even myths embodied in this new enthusiasm
towards introducing mobile devices as learning tools? Do the different actors involved in the
teaching/learning process, namely students and teachers, share the same “culture of educa-
tion”? Is the teachers’ culture of education relevant to students’ community of practice? And
the answer was: no. The cultural frames through which the students make sense of both the
learning process and the technology were not consistent with those of the institutions and
practitioners eager to embrace the mobile shift in education.

Teachers and institutions support this choice according to some specific professional systems
of beliefs. The first system of beliefs concerns the very definition of education. The one at play
strictly depends on the so-called socio-constructivistic model of the learning/teaching process.
According to this theoretical framework, knowledge is not a ready-made product to be delivered;
rather it is the partially undetermined result of social praxis. Consequently, the educational
process is conceived of as a knowledge-building joint activity. Teachers are supposed to guide
newcomers through cultural apprenticeships (Lave, 1996; Rogoff, 1990; 1995). As a corollary of this view, students are defined as seekers of knowledge (Caron, 2008). They are expected to actively participate in the educational process by bringing their cognitive and cultural world into the community of learners to which they belong.

Mobile technologies seem to be perfectly compatible with this conception of learning.

The second belief is something we all believe in as if it were “true”: the continuity/contiguity pattern in education and particularly the idea that the more able an educational activity is to connect with the students’ specific social and cultural worlds, the more efficient it is supposed to be. The transfer of mobile digital players and podcasting content from peer culture to school culture is strongly anchored in the belief that educational practices should reach students where they are, and in the idea that educational tools should be ecological, which means consistent with students’ everyday culture and life out of school.

As our research demonstrates, these crucial beliefs of our professional “culture of education” are less shared by the students’ culture of education than we suppose they are. I summarize the main differences that make for what we called a clash of cultures.

First difference: students’ everyday academic practices appear to be organized according to a pragmatic approach to the learning process. In students’ cultural community, performing in an efficient way and acting as a “good enough” student entails learning what the professor has defined as relevant, necessary, and moreover sufficient information to pass the course; nothing less, nothing more.

Second difference: students in this study did not appear to be inclined to act as active learners, to engage in a “learning by doing or discovering” process, or to contribute to the construction of such a distributed and rhizomatic knowledge. This very “post-modern” definition of knowledge seems to be a very “experience-distant concept” from the students’ point of view. According to the students’ specific culture, knowledge is an A to Z system enclosed within boundaries and the professor is the one who knows what this knowledge is made of.

The students’ pragmatic approach to learning therefore seems to contrast with some of the basic principles of the socio-constructivist approach to learning and teaching. One of the main arguments justifying the adoption of digital mobile learning devices seems, then, to make very little sense in students’ specific culture.

The third cultural difference concerns the very contemporary idea of learning as a context-free activity. Our research reveals that “mobile learning” is an oxymoron, at least in terms of the students’ specific culture. Learning appears to require specific spatial and temporal boundary markers and settings. Reading, taking notes, understanding, remembering, and preparing for exams are “unmoving” cognitive activities that preferably occur at home, in the library and in front of the personal computer equipped with a large screen—or at least a screen larger than that on an iPod.

The fourth and perhaps main difference concerns the way students have interpreted the Mp3 technology. And here I come back to David Buckingham’s statements, when he notices that:

“The fact that much of what people do with digital technology isn’t really about information at all seems to be largely ignored. The image of the ideal user here seems to be that of the responsible and efficient information-seeker —and it’s an image that contrasts quite strik-
ingly with what young people mostly do with technology, which we know is largely about accessing entertainment content, or chatting with friends or playing games online.”

Our case study provides strong evidence of these cultural uses of mobile communication and information technologies: listening to popular music, constructing digital texts for their own use, sharing their repertoires of “identity texts” and digitized moments of their everyday life, were everyday practices in student’s life. They were both producers and consumers of moving cultures (Caron, Caronia, 2007). However the culture and texts they consumed and produced were not of academic, educational or otherwise school-oriented nature.

Here is the crucial point: mobile digital players are mainly perceived and used as a mobile entertainment technology strongly associated with personal leisure and social life. The mobile consumption of music, the social sharing of videos, photos, digitized moments of social events, the carrying of one’s own universe of cultural references, all of these and similar iPod practices punctuate young people’s everyday life. Our study reveals that students are moving consumers of culture, although the culture they consume in context-free ways is not academic.

The use of this technology symbolically sets a clear boundary between everyday culture and academic culture, between social life and academic life. This trait of the students’ specific culture strongly contrasts with the continuity pattern in education. If we look more at students’ practices than at their official statements, it is clear that the idea that it is useful and even necessary to blurring boundaries between the life-world out of school and the life-world in school, is only our idea. Students and even children dedicate a lot of symbolic work to set boundaries between their peer community and culture and the school community and culture, they routinely create what social psychologists and the ethnographers of children’s everyday life call the “underground life” with respect to school world (and family life).

If we look at young people’s everyday life through the lens of the ethnographer, we can see that one of the main educational arguments supporting the adoption of mobile teaching and learning devices — namely the ecological view and the necessity of blurring boundaries — seems not to be part of students’ specific culture. From the students’ point of view, efficient learning does not imply transforming every single moment and place into a learning environment, nor does it imply tearing down the boundaries between formal and informal education. What may be and actually is relevant for an efficient social life, multitasking, mobile consumption of culture, mobile networking, and even the use of the iPod, is not necessarily relevant for efficient academic life, and vice-versa.

The research was a quasi-experimental study. Or —I should say— a quasi naturalistic inquiry intended to grasp students’ uses and perception of mobile information devices as a learning tool. So we cannot take the results as a general rule. As some case studies discussed by Bachmair, Pachler and Cook (2009) show, there is the possibility that the two cultures of education at play can overlap. In our case, what we recorded was a real clash of cultures. So the very result of such a study is not “this is how things work” but an evidence-based caution with respect to the contemporary enthusiasm towards the digital shift in education. An enthusiasm that —as David Buckingham underlines— seems to be once more informed by
a reductionist and still deterministic view of technological innovation, the educational process and the actors involved, and by the “technology is better” ideology.

As David Buckingham so well illustrates in his chapter and as the empirical evidence we have found in our research suggests, we need to rethink not only our common representation of technologies (Kerr, 2004) but also and more importantly our educational certainties and the educational paradigms that we take —perhaps too much— for granted with respect to efficient media education.

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This text was written within the context of the Second European Congress on media literacy, which was held in Bellaria, on the banks of the Adriatic in Italy. Facing us is Sarajevo, a part of Europe that was in a state of war not so long ago—a time of hate that our democracies do everything to prevent, but from which nothing is protected. Media literacy, as it plays a part in our culture of democracy, is there to consider our words, our debates, the public scene of our exchanges and beliefs. But our democracies are also liberal democracies: economically and ideologically, they favour the free market in texts and images of information and communication, the trade in them, and their movements. In this context, media literacy is not so easy to imagine. This text would therefore like to give an account of the political paradox that is constituted by all media literacy in societies where the culture of liberal democracy prevails. Originally, these lines were a response to David Buckingham’s inaugural plenary conference, which he entitled: “The future of media literacy in a digital age: Some challenges for policy and practice1”. You can find the whole of this speech in the pages of this book. Along with two other acolytes (Ben Bachmair of the University of Kassel) and Letizia Caronia (of the University of Bologna) we had to respond after him, inspired by his analyses. I have therefore retained the initial setup of my speech where isolated phrases from David Buckingham serve as a pretext for my consideration of the political role of media literacy in a Europe that wages war far from its own lands, but at home maintains a daily vigilance when it comes to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

1. See in this book The future of media literacy in the digital age: some challenges for policy and practice by David Buckingham, p. 15.
Technological determinism and political determination

Each new medium, each new technology, opens a new debate on what is being reinvented, on what is at stake from the political point of view. Technology, it is true, determines new imaginative social worlds. This is what is called determinist discourse: technology would reinvent our forms of interpreting the world, and by this very fact redefine a way of thinking about the world. Who has not heard, concerning the digital age, that we have all become journalists, that the world of information now belongs to the people, that we are all part of social networks and that we have all become excessively socialised? As if by magic, we have become producers and citizens of a global community by the fact of owning our computers, as if we had left the age of effects for the age of uses. We shall no longer be subject to the messages of mass culture—we shall be the joint masters of the new rules of global communication.

I should like to say, following on from David Buckingham, that we must not deceive ourselves. Yes, new forms of expression are appearing; yes, a new interpretation of the world and new forms of appropriation of the media are possible, thanks to the new Internet technologies; yes, debates, dialogues, and interactivity are made easy by sites and blogs offering communication and information. However, it would be extremely naive to think that we have changed the world, and that this change was initiated by the new technologies. The great legends that we recounts, the great stories that we share are determined not by technology, but by the political projects of our governments, and by our own economic models.

Our objects are living objects: convergence

The objects on which we work are living objects. By this, I mean that they are alive, they move around, they metamorphose, they mutate, they move every day. The word “convergence” that David Buckingham uses is fundamental, but it can also be heard in some of the media and certain advertising agencies in other forms. Speaking of publicity, I have heard talk of “viral convergence” or “360° convergence”. The new forms of journalism, and the new forms of communication, consist of finding a format for each medium, so that a message sent by these media is able to reach us by a thousand channels, and a thousand networks. The messages of the media culture are hybrids: they are both information and communication; they are both fact and fiction; in the end, they are capable of finding their “mediageny” depending on the population groups and media that receive them. This means that a radio transmission finds itself extended via an Internet site, a web page is echoed in the Press, advertising for a brand of deodorant has its musical clip played on a television network...

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It also means that the reactions of web-surfers belong to media-based stories, and that these stories are shaped within this reactivity between the groups of producers, public institutions, political institutions and public user groups. There is something unsettling about this spectre of 360° media. Media literacy, in actual fact, must question the movements and hybridisation of messages in the media culture, and not content itself with thinking in terms of old or new media, but in terms of new movements and new forms. Our media are living objects; our sciences must also be alive in order to analyse the present discourses that condition our forms of exchange and beliefs.

**Media literacy**

When a new technology is put in place, fed by a thousand technical innovations, we are threatened by a twofold danger. The former, quite rightly, is to concern ourselves solely with access to this technology; how to provide education about a medium if pupils don’t have access to this medium. Political discourses then concentrate on access to the tools, and on new forms of regulation that these new technologies invite us to consider. A second phase follows quickly enough; that of the accessibility of tools within the framework of the school culture: in view of the costs involved in purchasing equipment, I do not know a single educational establishment that has not wondered about the educational value of such tools. You can’t equip a college or grammar school with 300 computer screens, software and WIFI without asking yourself how all the teaching staff will benefit from it. My point of view is clear-cut: our work consists of offering an education about media and under no circumstances an education through media. But we must still await our moment a little longer, wait on the one hand while the educational establishments who have paid for the equipment have taken possession of the tools, then wait while the uses to which these new technologies are put are sufficiently identifiable. Then our work can begin: consulting the media, their languages, their economies, the conditions under which they are manufactured, the conditions for receiving them, their histories, the place occupied by their narratives in our representation of the world, their political roles; finally, creating media the better to understand them, considering the ‘presents’ that they incessantly draw for us, and the futures that they are already imposing on us. You will understand that the media skills of which I speak are those of the human and social sciences, with their multi-disciplinary nature, and not didactic skills. Economics of the media, sociology of the media, history of the media, political and media sciences, semiology and the media, gender studies and the media, media law… It seems to me that we are sometimes too quick to forget the scientific origin of our multiple studies, and that we should refer to them more diligently.

**The culture of democracy**

Our democracies are neo-liberal: what does this mean? The markets are free to produce the strangest changes in the media and to reinvent, on a daily basis, the forms in which we receive information, communications, and advertising. It is at the price of this liberty that we pursue, in Western socie-
ties, what Michael Walzer has so correctly analysed as being “the culture of democracy”. A democracy does not declare itself, nor does it limit itself to a mechanism of free elections. A democracy takes root each day in a culture.

“Democracy is a way of distributing power and legitimising its use — or rather it’s the political way of distributing power. [...] What counts is organised debate between citizens. Democracy promotes discourse, persuasion, and rhetorical talent. Ideally, the citizen who puts forward the most persuasive line of argument — that is to say the line of argument that effectively convinces the greatest number of citizens — prevails.”

The media, as we know, are places for debate, persuasion, rhetorical talent, argument. In neo-liberal Western societies, the media are free in their movements and strategies, free to reinvent new forms of persuasion, rhetorical talent, argument… Paradoxically, it is at the price of this freedom, that prevents us from “regulating” if not from “censoring” the media, that the culture of our democracies endures. But the day when our political commitments no longer take account of media literacy as an integral part of this culture of democracy, we will leave the adventure of our liberty open to reappraisal each day. Our political commitments within the culture of democracy rest on this paradox: on the one hand, accepting the multiple forms of digital and convergent media-cultures, and on the other equipping each citizen with the resources to comprehend the wealth of these forms.

We may also wonder if our societies, all being democracies, would benefit from considering, within the framework of educational systems, the forms taken by our political narratives. I have always had this suspicion: if Europe still hasn’t managed to institute a system of media literacy, on an official and culturally established basis, with all the mechanisms for primary and ongoing teaching that this presupposes, it is perhaps that we fundamentally do not want one. What would hold us back, in a subtle political unconscious, would be to produce a society in which beliefs were systematically questioned, where the political scene of our exchanges that are born in our media as public spaces confronted on a daily basis by all the citizens. How then, under these conditions do we share our ideas, live by them and keep to them, if each day were examined as though they were media productions? Now, democracy rightly claims that it is also involved in the ongoing reinvention of the forms of its narratives, in the unrestricted movement of messages, without distinction regarding the genre: advertising, communications, informative. It could be that it is not the purpose of our democratic societies systematically to offer the population media literacy that in essence is reinvented as technological inventions dictate, but also as our strategies dictate in reinventing the world and updating our ideologies. If democracy is this state of invention and the liberty that characterises it, we are entitled to wonder how we institutionalise media literacy…

In this sense, in France, Jacques Gonnet has proposed as an alternative to media literacy an education in current affairs that takes the form of workshops for democracy. His proposition still remains particularly relevant today.

Regarding media skills

During the Second European Congress on media literacy which was held in Bellaria between 21-24 October 2009, within the framework of research forums, I was able to hear a definition of competence given by Aurélie Brouwers that had an immediate attraction for me: “Competence is a personal ability to adapt in a new, non-stereotypical way to totally new situations.”

This definition interests me particularly with regard to media literacy. It tells us that competence is not a fixed quality, frozen in dogmatic knowledge, taught in the certitude of knowledge understood as a lifeless academic acquisition, with no capacity to react when faced with the new propositions with which we are incessantly bombarded by the world of the media. Faced with the media, faced with technological devices that are ceaselessly carried along by the narratives of innovation, faced with the movements of their messages, faced with the hybrid forms they are able to assume, we must indeed have a great capacity to adapt to brand new situations. This uniqueness of competences necessary to envisage media literacy could discourage more than one educational establishment from wishing to subscribe to a “definitive” position on classes in media literacy. This again would be another possible reason justifying the fact that media analysis should limit itself to unofficial approaches based on short-term programming and always temporary in nature. In the end, it would always be the historians who were right about our blind, frantic attempts, since they know how to look at the beast with the detached comfort of the historian, that is not possessed by those who would like to see what blood is passing through its veins while its heart is still beating. This would perhaps mean our having to rethink our sciences, rub them against each other so that from their multiple academic competences there might arise a great field of critical and constructive thoughts on what constitutes our shared spaces of sociability: our public and private media spaces.

In the text adopted by the European Parliament on 16 December 2008, entitled “Media skills in a digital world” we can see that those involved in media literacy in Europe intend the term “media skills” to refer to “the ability to use different media in an independent way, to understand and critically evaluate not only the various aspects of the media as such, but also media content, to communicate this within various contexts, creating and circulating media content.”

“Given that media literacy has a decisive part to play in acquiring a high level of media skills”, the European parliament also adds that: “citizens who are well-informed and politically mature lie at the basis of a pluralistic society and the creation of personal media content and products allows them to acquire skills enabling them to gain a better understanding of the principles and values that underlie the media content produced by the professionals […]”

So we need to re-invent the places for media analysis and creation, given that these places need to take into account the extreme renewals and metamorphoses of the languages which motivate the media, the constantly renewed reactivity we need to call upon in the face of the developments which ask new questions of the narration of our “legends”, the occa-
sional nervousness of disciplines which protect a knowledge too narrow for the subjects which interest us here, and the time for media creation which requires so much diversified intelligence (images, montages, writing, translation of the world, position of the subject in his or her environment, and so on).

However this is actually the price of maintaining democratic skills intact.

**Definitions and research in media literacy**

The list of our visions concerning the role and the practices of media literacy in Europe established by David Buckingham is enough to make us think about what we understand, collectively and individually, by media literacy. My approximate translation attempts to exaggerate its surrealist qualities: “to encourage the use of information and communication technologies; to promote a history of the audio-visual and the cinematic in order to understand today’s media; to protect children from the risks they run by visiting certain on-line sites; to foster social inclusion and to welcome immigrants into a society based on knowledge; to promote independent public media; to enable the public to withstand commercial persuasion and marketing practices; to encourage citizenship; to foster artistic creation and personal expression; to reinvent the school of the 21st century by increasing the standing of media apprenticeship; to promote equality, tolerance, diversity and human rights; to encourage the harmonious development of European media; to help people take economic decisions by allowing them to acquire media analysis skills; to develop human resources”! And it’s all true: media literacy, when no longer thought of as a simple educational practice, takes on a social and sometimes militant flavour in any event that of citizens on a European scale. However we need to divide it up into intelligible sectors and perhaps research may be able to teach us some useful lessons. With Litsa Kourtí from Athens University, and before her Geneviève Jacquinot who started up these meetings, over these four days we auditioned over 22 media literacy researchers, and we were asked to produce a summary for all those taking part in the conference. Basically, I feel that we heard about three distinct sectors of research which might allow us to instil a bit of organisation into our generous wish to inject all the social, economic, cultural and political spheres with a dose of media literacy!

The first sector brings together all kinds of media studies, all kinds of research looking into the economics, sociology, history and semiology of the media. To which markets do the different types of media belong, who produced them, which public acknowledges them and how does this public use them, what histories do they inherit, which are their languages, what are their images, what part do they play, by telling the story of what happens to us, on the public and democratic scene? The media itself is the subject of all this research which can be transferred to form part of pluridisciplinary teaching. This will allow us to understand the media, to know how to ask questions of it in its complexity.

The second sector brings together all the studies on teaching experiences and educational practices, whether or not within a school environment, which have been started in media literacy. The subject of this research is not the media, but the educational and teaching skills required for any media literacy action. This research is part of educational sciences, and underlines the paradoxes and projects taken into precise situations in which the media is the subject of analyses or practices. This research of necessity poses the question of the institutional context in which these media literacy practices take root, the context within which
teachers or educators are trained, the teaching content put in place as well as the implicit intentions these practices convey.

The third sector draws on all the research into the effects of the media, on protecting childhood, on the influence that the media can have in a given society at a given time. We would like to define this part of media literacy research as being associated with the political sciences: how the media allows us to be together, how we can withstand its force of persuasion and still encourage a culture of democracy. So this research relates to the public question of citizenship, of social inclusion, of integration, of welcome for marginalised populations, and so on.

The purpose of this inventory of research into media literacy is not to erect walls. Its aim is to provide precise details about what we are talking about and to distinguish what is scientifically and politically implicit in media literacy actions on a European scale.

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Constructive Controversies
A global Media Literacy perspective aims to provide the youngsters with a set of appropriate technical skills, an ability to think critically and adequate creative capacities. This implies a clear understanding that Media Literacy needs to move from being a specific individual choice to become an integral part of a wider educational process meant to elicit an improved brand of citizenship. In this context, the digital competence is actually one of the specific competences that school systems should include as a main component of the future citizens’ curriculum.

However, this subject begs a lot of questions: Is it a reasonable consideration to make room for Media Literacy among the educational process? Will the parents be ready to hold their children’s hand on facing the media? Would the Media Industries be prepared to help meet the requirements of these educational processes thus revisited?

In any case the main problem will still lie with evaluating processes and their outcome: should we stick to traditional tools for evaluation and assessment or should we shift to new ones? Should we focus on evaluating only digital skills or, more generally, media skills?

These questions are intended here as a body of constructive controversies within Media Literacy.

1. The European Recommendation dated 18 December 2006 sets a framework for the eight citizenship competencies that schools and lifelong education have to develop. This
framework includes a definition of “digital competence”. This is an interesting turning point from the perspective of how Media Literacy is taken by society: what was previously seen as one of the many strands of education expected from our school systems has turned into one of the key competencies the future citizens should earn at school. Accordingly, the very concept of Media Literacy has switched from being a mere option to being a core part of a wider Citizenship Education (Rivoltella, 2008). This explains why the European Recommendation dated 20 August 2009 states that “Media Literacy is a matter of inclusion and citizenship in today’s Information Society. […] Media literacy is today regarded as one of the key prerequisites for an active and full citizenship in order to prevent and reduce the risks of exclusion from community life”.

2. What does it take to develop a digital competence? These three fields at least are worth considering:

- **skills**: to be able to use IST (Information Society Technologies) in job-oriented and everyday activities; communicate; produce, find, store, share and evaluate information;
- **critical thinking**: to be aware of risks and opportunities of technologies; to be able to read and analyse messages;
- **creative acting**: to be able to produce content, to express oneself using these new languages, to be able to use these tools in innovative ways.

3. The Recommendation refers to Information Society Technologies (IST). Those would normally include: computer, Internet and its applications (nowadays mostly 2.0 applications such as Facebook, blogs, wikies and all the other Social Network tools). But we shouldn’t forget that the Information Society also includes:

- other technologies that are very much a part of youths’ and adults’ everyday life, like mobile phones, MP3 players and videogame consoles;
- other media, probably not as “new” as they are actually “re-newed” by the digital convergence and finally re-mediated (Bolter & Grusin, 2000): television, cinema (now available on a lot of different screens), radio, newspapers.

So, when we talk about digital competence, we have to construe this competence in a wider sense. It includes those media competencies that used to power the so called “old media” from behind the scenes. In so far as these media became “new” and made their way into the new digital media arena, it would be quite strange not to consider them in developing the education of tomorrow’s citizens.

4. The current media arena looks different indeed to the previous one. This change is well captured by Roger Silverstone (2007). The media arena (which he calls “Mediapolis”) includes:

- a space of appearance, i.e. a space where the world could appear and take an appearance informed by the structure of the world itself;

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not only an appendix to the “physical” social and political arenas (as Anna Harendt said), but a part of this arena itself;
• a space where we can experiment the convergence of discourse and action. Better: in this space every discourse is an action. As I already argued in one of my books (Rivoltella, 2003), the media arena is a pragmatic arena where we really understand what John Langshaw Austin meant on talking about our ability to ‘do things with words’.

5. At the same time, the media arena offers a space where the youths can experiment, an effective marketplace for industries and a “classroom” for educators.

6. The youngsters’ experience of the media arena is characterized by various activities. They use the media in their free-time (mainly videogames and music), or to foster their social relations (this is the case of instant messaging and mobile phones), or to produce content likely to earn them visibility in the public space (when they take a photo or make a video to be posted on Youtube, Flickr or another web space). All these activities contribute to shape a consumption profile of the youngsters that stands out from those we are familiar with. Two main features drive this new profile: first, youngsters nowadays are really “taming the media”, turning ubiquitous, persistent and meaningful media into the natural setting for a lot of their activities; moreover, youngsters are nowadays more active, they are less receiving content, more authoring it, being able to produce and publish their own messages. This is a sea-change. Youngsters are no longer to be protected from bad messages or from the risks of interacting with the media; on the contrary this is a constituency that has to feel responsible for his / her own acts. The shift goes from protection to responsibility. This change is radical enough to call us to reconsider our representation of Childhood and Adolescence as the Age of Innocence: in order to give them a sense of responsibility, we need to consider them as citizens and to help them become aware of this fact.

7. The media arena currently affords Media Industries both an opportunity and a challenge. It’s an opportunity because the media arena is wide, youngsters are populating it and youngsters are helping the market grow. The problems here — from the education point of view — concern the quality of content, the volume of access, the marketing actions aimed at adults albeit using youngsters as a target. Probably we need a new alliance between industries and education. Media Literacy could represent for them a good opportunity for a self-regulation able to balance educative consideration with market-orientation. Several initiatives point in this direction: media educators being hired by corporations, the presence of media professionals in schools, the research of new quality formats and services for youngsters.

8. We truly believe that the media arena is a classroom for educators. However, educators — both in family and at school — seem to have a problem making the most of this classroom. Parents are really puzzled by their children’s ways of consumption: they don’t understand what youngsters do with the media, they think that computer and Internet are important for their future but they are very concerned with the risks associated with these technologies. So, they tend to devolve the responsibility to educate children about the media to schoolteachers: this is their way to try and dodge the issue, by convincing themselves that it belongs to others.
The situation in schools is not any better. Here the problem lies with the curricula —which make too big a room for technologies and skills, too small for media culture— and with the teachers. Their training remains a big question: they are inclined to offset the competencies they lack by acquiring technological skills. On the contrary, the problem with media and technologies is a problem of methods and techniques: it is not a matter of learning how to use media, but of letting the media transform our teaching behaviours.

9. Throughout these cases, one of the main problems is how to evaluate processes and outcomes. Evaluation is almost all about content. In the old media arena, this issue would boil down to quality: the civil society, the associations of parents and of the media would rely on standards and controls on assessing this quality. The new media arena makes this problem more intricate as social media tend to be considered good even if their quality — by traditional media standards — is bad. So: What is a quality content? Is it still good if it provides reliable, factually correct information via low-quality images and sounds? What are the criteria according to which we can evaluate this? On the other hand, we have also a big problem with the very notion of assessment: What are we trying to do on assessing students’ media competencies? There is no easy answer!

We cannot use traditional assessment tools since they normally address the information ide, not the quality of a performance. So, we have to change the way we assess content by switching to methods and techniques of authentic assessment, i.e. ethnographic observation, embedded tasks, portfolios, and so on...
In today’s world, media are intimately linked to the economic functioning of the planet. Probably more than other sectors, the media, whatever forms they take, depend on economics in all its guises: its logic, its structures, its actors, behaviours, customs... It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that in the relationship between the world - and each individual making up that world — and the media, everything has to do with economics in one way or another.

Whether material or immaterial, media content would not exist if it were not conveyed through physical mediums of various kinds. These mediums are almost invariably designed, produced and sold by private companies.

Most of the information conveyed through these mediums is also produced by private companies having devised, produced and marketed it. And often this information is bought by media operators — also increasingly economics-oriented — who broadcast it on platforms available to them because they are the ones having created or bought them.

These platforms are also configured in economic terms. They compete to attract the largest possible number (or more often “best number”) of users (or “clients”) by the specificity of their configurations and offerings of content.

As for the content, though some is cultural or informational, other content (and I’m thinking especially of advertising-related content) is through and through economics-oriented, because its function is to attract the user in order to get him/her to buy something.

Media, content and platforms are therefore all directly influenced by economic mechanisms, as are the agents on which they depend (producers, manufacturers, operators, etc.).

Media Industries and Education: What Mutual Interests, and for What Purpose?
We cannot therefore consider the issue of media education without taking into account
the intrinsically economic character of the whole sphere of the media and considering all the
actors involved.

The relationship between “economics” and “education” is here, to a greater extent than
in most other areas, marked by a growing gap between “media literacy” and “literacy in
the use of media”, the middle (but perhaps not central) point between them being “literacy
through the use of media.”

**Industry and need to use**

From an economic point of view, i.e. taking into account the parameters at work in media
economics, any development of an activity requiring the use of media of any kind can only
be beneficial, whether it be an educational activity or any other type of activity or user behav-
ior. From this point of view, media are primarily considered as objects, whether apprehend-
ed as physical carriers of information or as content.

For the industry, it is essential that there be a need for using the object, involving, at some
level, its appropriation. The object triggers its acquisition because of the need (actual or
relative) to use it.

At this level, the media industry has no need of a relationship with the world of education.
If we exclude media having an essentially informational function (the boundaries of which
remain to be defined), most media objects that surround us and which we use daily have
not acquired their position through educational use, but rather in a playful context. The more
sophisticated as well as the simplest forms of media around us are there, in the main, to en-
tertain us, and their acquisition has often been made in this context.

Some of these objects may one day assume an educational form. But in the past educa-
tional implementation has come only later, after the education sector —often reticent when
it comes to yielding to others its teaching prerogatives and power— realises that it is possible
to give learning a less austere form, and appropriates and adapts the use of certain media
in a learning environment.

There have been cases where educational content has quickly become associated with
the birth or the development of certain media carriers. But this has rarely been the result either
of chance or of a desire to educate. If some mediums have quickly become carriers of edu-
cational content, it has often been at the behest of the producers of these mediums themselves,
in order to increase the social legitimacy of using them, against their condemnation by certain
spheres of society for their propensity to entertain (or subvert) users “without contributing any-
ting constructive” —that is to say, without enabling them to acquire knowledge or skills.
Popularising Use

Under a capitalistic logic based on maximising profits and minimising costs, the media carrier industry has only one concern: to popularise the use of its products as much as possible in order to maximally increase production. It is therefore essential that it be easy for target users to acquire the skills necessary for using the medium. The users of a medium difficult to use will be people eager for novelty, ready to become part of a complex dynamic and proud of belonging to a circle of insiders able to master the use of a sophisticated product. Conversely, a medium that is easy to use, or the use of which is in line with usage patterns already mastered by potential customers, has a great future. Between these two extremes, the aim is to familiarise as many people as possible with a tool the process of acquisition of which may at first seem complex, but which it is easy to learn to use and make one’s own.

At this stage, the industry’s expectations vis-à-vis education are obvious: to obtain the design of effective learning procedures in order to enable as many people as possible to manage their relationship with the medium positively, and, once this has been achieved, to create the incentive for acquiring the medium, and finally to exploit as much as possible all the variations, extensions and types of content the medium offers. In order to maximally promote this economic chain of media production, and for the user to become a user of ever more content and services, the process of mastering the use of the tool is, economically speaking, essential. Without users’ ability to master its use, then even if they acquire the tool, they will not use it to fulfil their increasingly sophisticated desires, and only those at the first stage of the chain, the marketing stage, will be satisfied.

The industry therefore expects the education sector to help it in teaching people to use the mediums it develops, especially the ones every human being in the twenty-first century can hardly do without. First of these is the home computer, the use of which has become normal not only for entertainment, but also because social and institutional discourse has made it so. Training in the use of a computer has become comparable to learning basic social skills. Learning to use this tool has become vital, a question of survival. But this does not prevent the education sector from being used to own advantage by the production sector. Even if it is happening in the name of the common good, we cannot deny that at the present stage, the education sector is in fact serving the industry.

Educational Uses

As we have mentioned, media tools’ becoming used educationally is rarely the result of chance. And a new media object’s becoming part of the world of education does not generally happen automatically. Nevertheless, it is clear that the use of media in a learning environment is becoming more and more commonplace. The world of education now seems to have understood that it is easier to introduce media into schools than to have to fight against their existence in the name of knowledge and the eternal character of conventional modes of transmission of knowledge. The use of media in an educational context also helps build bridges between the fortress that was once the school and wider society. Learners no longer have to break with their daily cultural habits as soon as they enter their place of education. The media carriers they use in their daily lives are now also part of education — though of course they are not used in the same perspective.
Education is now being given “through the use of” media, and not only in formal learning settings, but in increasingly diverse contexts.

Here we are at the centre of the tension between economics and education, at a kind of focal point where interests appear to be shared.

For the media industry, the use of media tools in educational contexts can only be positive: the producers of media carriers gain new outlets; and the producers of content gain new areas of application for their platforms and products, as well as the opportunity to grow in sectors that were previously not open to them. As modern mediums exercise a greater attraction than talks and lectures (even if these are not too austere), the use of media learning tools makes the design of more seductive, and therefore perhaps more efficient, learning processes possible — inasmuch, however, that they do not take away from the content what they add to the form.

In becoming a useful adjunct to education, the industry is pursuing the process of legitimising its presence (and its salience) in the social sphere. Using mediums and media content not only enables people to become citizens of the world of today, but also to educate themselves, and to educate themselves better and more pleasantly.

Faced with such a picture, how might it still be possible to challenge the way the media industries work and to question their presence, or their oligarchic way of positioning themselves, in the world?

Here the industry is not the only winner. It would be an exaggeration to speak of a “win-win situation”, but it is clear that the progressive intrusion of media into the world of learning has revolutionised education, learning, the role of teachers and student-teacher relationships. “Learning through the use of media” has become normal, and sometimes even the default configuration of a course of education — provided, however, that the teacher integrates the role of media into her approach, using it not only as a support for illustrations, but also (or even primarily) as an educational tool.

It is obvious here that the economic sphere has an interest in wooing education, just as education has to some extent been useful for socialising the use of certain mediums and media services.

Nevertheless, mediums still tend to be regarded as “neutral”, that is to say, as mere tools. They are seen as transparent mediating tools, having only a use-value. This is at least how they are talked about.

And the same idea of neutrality is conferred on the platforms supporting these mediums, as well as on the content they convey. The aim is supposed to be utilitarian, merely seeking efficiency and thus the happiness and well-being of the users.

It is obviously necessary to go beyond this description of the situation, which means that we must consider the problem concerning us from a different angle.

Reversal of Relations

I will sketch out another component in the relationships between the media industry and education: media literacy itself. As suggested in the diagram at the beginning, media literacy can schematically be considered as constituting the opposite extreme of learning to use media.

But media literacy neither means considering the media primarily or only as tools that one has to learn to use, nor as tools allowing learning processes to be made more efficient
or attractive. In my view, the source and point of media literacy lies in learning skills that enable one to understand media objects and the content they convey in a civic, critical and humanist way — just as, for example, education in literature and language enables us to position ourselves in relation to the process of writing, literature and literary production.

In this sense, while media literacy lies at one extreme of the industry-education polarity mentioned above, it can also be regarded as a superstructure encompassing the whole process of handling any type of media component, whatever the stage of use concerned. Whether one is learning to use a medium, putting it to use as educational material or studying it in itself as medium, carrier or content, the medium has to be questioned at every stage.

The reduction of media to the rank of tools, and the apparent neutrality of use that follows, will in this way soon be challenged: we will realise that means of communication by media are neither neutral nor transparent, but carry tensions, lines of construction and issues of contention that it is for media literacy to highlight and to render perceptible to people in general, so that everyone can live his or her relationship to the media in an adult way.

This is an eminently critical, deconstructivist approach, which aims to bring to light hidden modes of functioning, mechanisms and systems of communication.

As suggested in the diagram, in this process of becoming media-aware, the relationship between education and economics is inverted with respect to the one we mentioned earlier. For while such questioning is an essential component of any training in the critical understanding of the media, the media industries are hardly interested in it, and we can even consider the expression I used above to be putting it mildly.

From the point of view of the industry, any questioning of the medium as object, carrier or content has no direct interest because, at least at first glance, it does not contribute to the expansion of its hegemony. For the media, a descriptive analysis of how they work, enabling a functional understanding of them, is more than enough.

The industry is socially justified by the inescapability of using media in our present society, and fears any critical reading that might call it into question and undermine the ideology of media welfare on which our current post-industrial society rests. The longer the media continue to be considered a “black box”, reduced to the role of transforming social needs (“inputs”) into socially usable outputs, the longer the power of the media industry on the social sphere will subsist.

**Divergent Interests**

If it can at all be considered as a whole, the media industry has no interest in contributing to, or even encouraging, media literacy that would lead citizens to question the legitimacy of the role played by it in contemporary societies. At least, this is the general reading we can give of the problem while conceding that in detail, things are obviously a little more nuanced. For the media industry consists of a multitude of actors working in different sectors and whose power to intervene in the social sphere is far from the same. Furthermore, promoting well-being, critical citizenship and cultural awareness is also among the tasks conferred on certain components of the media industry. Producers of mediums, platform managers and content creators also naturally maintain different kinds of relationships with their respective “clients”. The idea of a monolithic sector, or of the media industry as a single social actor, is therefore not entirely correct.
In our changing world, issues of control and conquest of markets, but also sometimes of the very survival of certain economic agents, are increasingly dividing players in the media sector. Only one rule ties them together: the rule that presides over the capitalist market economy. Whoever they are, the industry players are part of the same economy, dominated by the constant need to secure maximum profit margins.

At the stage described here, however, “media literacy” and “media industry” do not make good bedfellows. The interests of “education” and of “the industry” are less convergent or even in some respects diametrically opposed. One wants to raise awareness, the other would, at least to some extent, put it to sleep —although, once again, the situation cannot be characterised as quite so bipolar, some industry players being well aware of the need to educate people to media citizenship and contributing thereto. And certain issues raised in any process of media education can be resolved only in association with the industry. Players from industry and from education have been known to associate in a single educational process. This is not, however, the norm, but rather the exception.

Need for Collaboration

The education sector takes the help of scientists and academics in seeking to understand how the media work. In some places and on some occasions, academics and media literacy educators can even form a single entity. An academic analysis of the media can be made quite easily on some questions that are useful to developing media literacy. The study of media content and of processes of reception and use, for example, is naturally part of researchers’ and educators’ areas of competence.

It should however be noted that the industry gives little support to research at this level. Few media companies commission studies on these topics by people in research, teaching or education. In most cases, instead of supporting public academic research, media companies prefer to use the services of discreet private agencies that carry out advanced, but very expensive, studies. And the results obviously remain secret.

Because the public sphere cannot partake of this research, it is unable to contribute to building up the knowledge on which to base good media literacy. This is a particularly unfortunate situation. There are also other areas where academia cannot, by itself, penetrate the complex mysteries of the media. Knowledge about media audiences so as to understand them, investigations into media economics, and the analysis of company structures, ownership systems, balance sheets, agreements and transactions between economic actors all requires access to more sensitive sources, which are rarely transparently and completely available.

In both cases described here the limits of a possible cooperation between media education and the industrial world become apparent: the civic public interest and the economic interests of private actors conflict.

Wherever their own interests are at stake, media companies do not care about the public interest. Whereas they like to communicate about themselves when it boosts their egos or their objectives, they prefer to remain silent and more discreet when it comes to making public things that would enable a better understanding of what they are and what their plans are.

Certain data that would allow a social significance to be produced and made public about the media therefore remain the property of the industry, thereby limiting the scope and relevance of the work of researchers and educators.
The lack of transparency in the industry renders some components of good media literacy opaque. And nothing seems to allow for an improvement in this area, not even the few cases where the industry has chosen to appeal to academic skills in order to illuminate certain problems. In most cases, there is a risk of manipulation of research results. And the aims of the industry, which are strategic and competitive, do not coincide with the preoccupations of researchers in media literacy.

Yet it seems that here lie the real issues. For, as noted earlier, media education cannot in today’s world neglect thoroughly deconstructing everything related to the media industry. In a world under the rule of economics, only a social reading of economic mechanisms can help us understand the parameters of the problem, to diagnose it and to act accordingly. Civic media literacy must be obtained through an understanding of the world of media industries, and through a questioning of their methods of operation, strategies and domination.

This work will not be able to be fully carried out without the aid of at least some components of the media industry who understand that we cannot remain content any longer with presenting the media as objects devoid of meaning. Instead, the media need to be presented as loci of meaning-production that need to be deciphered from top to bottom.

The wealth of media literacy depends on such a potential “new deal” between the media industry and educators, its quality and its relevance, in the service of human beings immersed in the media.

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Although the media landscape, as with cultural behaviours, has been in the midst of a major shift over the last ten years¹, major changes have also occurred in schools. It has become common practice for teachers to use online resources —websites, communication services, e-rooms, simulation tools and videos etc.— in order to prepare their lessons, find a new way to teach a concept and develop pupils’ digital skills. There is no denying that prior to the mass distribution of new media and new information practices, schools were already taking the initiative to equip themselves with new types of services, which to some extent resembled media devices but the design and use of which differed considerably from the concept of media literacy.

Whether it concerns digital resource portals, digital workspaces, interactive school textbooks etc., these devices offer a new means of access to knowledge and establish a new means of interaction between the school community and between the school community and the information. They are often presented as tools that aim to facilitate professional teaching practices and in turn student learning; the command of such tools is based on technical knowledge while the skills derived from them are of a practical nature. Only rarely are they considered as technologies, in terms of appropriation of the technique by use; as a result users are not required to develop a technological perspective of the system or to give a presentation on the technology they are using, which leads to a transition from functional use to a more reflexive use.

Moreover, they are considered to a lesser extent as media given their characteristics: they provide a platform of communication between the players in the educational community, they are editorialised via metaphors and interfaces, via the overlay of information layers — i.e. the “data” —, via choices that determine the means of access to information, communication or participation; they form part of an economic model that is under construction, at the crossroads of public service institutions and industries governed by market rules.

Lastly, they only maintain a superficial relationship with the digital culture of young people. Although the pupils are always designated as the beneficiaries of the in fine service, reflection on the adequacy between the device, digital practices and the development of knowledge is not often fully explored.

Media educators cannot remain indifferent to the increasingly significant role that digital media devices play in the education system. This is all the more important given the significance of the issue. When observing the manner in which teachers use such media, there is a fear of a regression in terms of the critical reflection at stake in the use of digital media.

The right of access to information

In terms of the access to information, or more precisely editorialised content, the resource platforms form a key element. Their aim is to facilitate the dynamic use of digital documents in order to prevent teachers from spending time looking for the suitable resources and to prevent pupils from drifting onto websites that the institution deems unsuitable. As offshoots of educational resource portals, these platforms are designed from a more technological and informational viewpoint rather than from a media viewpoint. The interaction that they establish between the users is for the most part based on the concept of external constraints, such as the principle of access rights assigned to user profiles: the pupils have access to certain information while the teachers have access to other information and the network administrators have access to all data etc.; moreover the assignment of these rights is almost never the result of a discussion aimed at defining the use of these platforms and moreover they are neither the result of civic reflection on the underlying issues of power, reflection that would implicate the students. It is apparent here that by bringing the concept of the right to information into the debate, in the sense of Human rights, we may go beyond the functional appropriation of this media object and open the way towards a civic appropriation.

This type of interaction is imposed on the one hand by the master plans established by the policy or by a techno-structure and on the other hand by an implicit sense of sharing: it goes without saying that teachers and pupils should not have access to the same information or that 10 year old pupils and 15 year old pupils should be able to access the same information etc.; indeed if a device was freely accessible, media educators would be required to eavesdrop. Under the guise of the protection of personal data, the relationship that each participant is required to build with the information is thus pre-formatted by the engineers, with the risk that they project their own perspective of the school and the educational programme. Although media educators often work alongside the designers in order to understand and take into account the intentionality of messages — in order to sell, inform, mobilise and disinform etc. — this approach is never applicable to school media devices.
Media transparency and opacity

Moreover, the purpose of these media devices is to be transparent. They are presented by the designers as being light, discrete objects that should give precedence to the inherent messages and uses. In 2006, on the subject of school networks, Gérard Puimatto stated: “we expect them to take a backseat and to be forgotten, thus enabling the information technology functions and principles to step aside in order to give precedence to the information and its methods of access”. It is the same expectation that appears to currently correspond with complex digital media, whether or not they are school objects. Let us consider the functioning of search engines or practices like the uploading of photos on remote servers such as Picasa: the information embedded in the technical devices is overlaid without ever being clarified, to the point where it completely conceals the information and communication system that it underpins. These new media objects themselves offer no further information than what the media is required to provide in order to ensure rational use.

It is alongside press companies and media professionals as well as individuals who are themselves information providers as a result of 2.0 web technology that other parties play a role in the mediation of information: researchers, engineers and computer specialists. If we take the example of Google: these professionals enable or facilitate access to particular information over any other information by tag positioning and more generally by the information system, in the information technology sense of the term, which they are developing. Such mediators produce new types of media and new interactions —let us take RSS feeds as an example, news aggregators that causes a great deal of problems for press organisations; these are placed between the message and the receiver when the data is not mediated by the press organisation— with notifications, databases and cataloguing; it is again such mediators to whom we entrust the archiving of data and the right to erasure of data.

Yet, the teachers, pupils and users in general perceive these media devices as intangible, transparent and intrinsic, dedicated to establishing a collective and shared intelligence. However at the same time the teachers are aware and teach that the media, on-screen content and TV in particular portray an image of the world, which requires the information to be deconstructed in order to construct personal knowledge of the subject. With those new media, the challenge for media education is vast in terms of the perspectives that need to be taken into account and the knowledge and skills to be acquired.

Media neutrality, a myth that have hard time

With school media, together with the illusion of transparency, we are also faced with the illusion of neutrality. When a media device is introduced at a school, it acquires the status of an institutionalised object that is devoid of any critical viewpoint. This is the case with serious games or simulation tools, which are based on metaphors that are deemed to be “natural” and are rarely analysed as being subject to a rational choice.

Let’s take the example of online resource catalogues, which are designed, financed and promoted by educational institutions, and which moreover provide an extremely useful means for teachers to familiarise themselves with the digital resources. When observing their uses\(^3\), it is apparent that teachers never raise questions, and are never led to do so, about the “documents” of a catalogue that comprise the editorialised resources that are as diverse as online encyclopaedias, newspaper archives, television channel reports, knowledge associated with a discipline, tutoring sessions, interactive geographical maps etc. It is not that teachers are not able to exercise their educational freedom: on the contrary, they choose to make use of the documents that they feel are in keeping with their lesson plans, with the didactical nature of their discipline and the level of the pupils they are teaching. But very few of them question the documents themselves or the catalogue’s relevance, the conditions under which they are produced, the economic model or the intention of the producers etc.

As a result we are witnessing a rather pernicious “label effect”: once the resources have been incorporated into an information system designed by an institution, they are somewhat labelled and therefore no longer questioned by the teachers and *a fortiori* by the pupils. The institution is perceived as a neutral entity; the teachers, however vigilant they may be in terms of the relationship between educational objectives and legal requirements, no longer place importance on the strategic, economic and social choices that preside over the provisioning of such services. Everything is based on trust, in the peaceful certainty of the issue that has not been questioned, almost as if taking an objective distance of the issue or building critical skills have no place.

Such findings are even more significant when educational systems pursue large-scale endeavours to promote access to information via these new media devices and when their quantitative gradual enrichment may lead to the education system rejecting resources that do not fall under the label of the institution. If teachers, and in particular librarians of educational establishments place importance on the diversity of documents and make a strong and powerful assertion to take digital resources into account alongside other resources, the weight of publishing market and digital tools combined with the strong political desire to create a competitive knowledge-based economy may lead to the educational concerns of the teaching profession being swept aside. This can only lead to a backtrack in terms of educational progression.

**A culture of fragment**

With the standardisation of digital processing, information is currently embedded with “data” layers and “metadata”. This “informational” coverage leads teachers to refer to the “raw document” when documentary processing has not yet taken place. The “data” is intended to provide the most extensive indexing and therefore generalised interfacing, which as a result fragments and decontextualises the information, so that each individual is able to recontextualise it in their own way. How do we account for this decontextualisation-recontextualisation when media education has always insisted on the fact that information should only be interpreted within a context of production and reception?

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More specifically, the digital information retains teacher interest as it generally offers extremely structured messages, which are easy to fragment and isolate from the wider editorial context. A website or a service only provokes interest to the extent that the teacher is able to extract fragments that will fit in with their lesson plans. When the uses have a place, the teachers questioned construct their own media by interlinking uniform fragments according to a given objective. The Internet and digital school media thus serve as a kit enabling the assembly of all types of educational meccano from the decontextualised micro content.

**A complex relationship with the digital culture of pupils**

When justifying the deployment of digital devices in schools, the connection with the culture of young people is often used as an argument, where teachers feel inclined to use such devices in an attempt to be in tune with the times. Indeed, in spite of their personalised teaching techniques, they have real difficulties in integrating the digital culture of young people into their education programmes when the media devices themselves do not fulfil such needs. Quite often we come across a reinforcement of the gap that separates teachers from pupils, a separation of uses but above all a separation of perceptions. For those teachers who shy away from the use of technology, the presupposed issues regarding the uses of pupils outside school time remain strong. Some teachers overevaluate the skills of pupils in terms of their ability to access information and acknowledge that they are not clear about what young people are capable of in terms digital media, apart from the few practices associated with school work. On the other hand, other teachers discourage the common practices of their pupils on the basis of their lack of relevance. Even if these teachers do acknowledge an ability to manage the technology, such as faulty connections within the class, they consider that the pupils have no critical hindsight that allows them to master the use of such tools, such as information research.

Teachers, and not necessarily those who are more at ease with the technology, have opted to place the practices of young people at the heart of their teaching methods, with the ambitious educational objective to develop them. They endeavour to measure the level of appropriation of certain uses and to identify the knowledge and know-how that they must allow them to acquire. Alongside disciplinary objectives, they deem the acquisition of autonomy in the use of technology as being a strong objective. These teachers understand the fact that it is very difficult to change the practices that are already entrenched in the daily lives of pupils —the use of Google, Wikipedia— and get upset when they observe that their pupils go back to the practices that they have previously acquired outside of school.

**Mapping out together school media models**

It is quite evident that the conceptual and methodological elements of media education must find its place in the use of the new digital media devices that schools are currently equipped with, with a risk of marginalisation. Its anchor in a citizenship and political education gives

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added weight to the technological and informational approaches. But going beyond this, it would be beneficial if the media education specialists could work alongside other specialists so that they could design the new school media in unison. Researchers have mapped out strategies on such issues; as far as France is concerned, the team of Alexandre Serres at the University of Rennes 2 in France and its Research Group on the Culture and Didactics of Information⁵ is working on the convergence of the three literacies, technological, informational and media; the Compas group, of the Institut de l’École nationale supérieure [national higher school institute]⁶ encourages converging technology with cognitive science etc.

Contrary to the dissolution of their missions, the integration of these various approaches allows for the enrichment of media education, particularly in terms of the training of young people, who will after all be the users and innovators of media devices in the future.

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The question of evaluation has long been a problem for media education. It is often the "Cinderella" of media education debate: all the energy is spent on exciting pedagogies, creative practices, the exploding cultures of online media, and the dull question of evaluation is like a cinder in the ashes of the fire. But it has been referred to frequently, if briefly, in the three seminars. The summary of the Paris seminar, for instance, refers to the importance of assessment in the examples of radio production in a Belgian primary school and film education in the UK which he discusses.

Even when the model of media education is well-defined, as it is in the conceptual framework typical of media education in the higher years of schooling in the UK, the problem of assessing how well students have grasped concepts such as representation, audience, narrative and so on is well-rehearsed (e.g. Buckingham, Setton-Green & Fraser, 2000). The ideal would be to detect the developing understanding of the students from the creative processes they engage in — but in practice, examination boards still insist on written evaluations and analytical essays, which are supposed to display more clearly the conceptual grasp the student has attained. Thus, the three dangers are: that language becomes the medium of evaluation; that it is the evaluation that is evaluated, rather than the creative work itself; and that it is only abstract conceptual understanding which is assessed rather than creative production or cultural engagement.

* This paper was intended to inform the 5th theme of the first plenary session on Day 2 of the congress EuroMeduc of Bellaria.
However, the landscape we are considering is much broader, of course. We are considering two different dimensions: situational (other sites of media literacy than schools; and generational (life-long learning). In addition, we are having to take account of different models of media literacy evident in the workshops and presentations of the three seminars; the disjunction between old and new media; the tension between film education and media education; and the different dispositions, traditions, practices and policy contexts of different member states.

The problem of evaluation and assessment at root seems simple. If we can agree what media literacy is, and that, as the European Commission says (following in a long history of such exhortations), it is a fundamental right for citizens and young people, our next question is: how do we know when we have achieved it? In practical terms, this question falls into two parts. There is the older question of how media educators use the pedagogic tools of assessment and adapt them for the purposes of media literacy; and the more recent question for government agencies across Europe of how to measure levels of media literacy among their citizens.

The latter question is the subject of a current study commissioned by the EC’s media literacy unit, and we should wait for the publication of this study and the subsequent debate. Whatever is recommended as a set of criteria for the assessment of levels of media literacy is bound to be problematic. In the UK, we have had this debate for some time with our regulator, OFCOM, which has commissioned a number of quantitative studies of aspects of media literacy, mostly among young people. While the results of these studies are often informative and valuable, it is already clear that survey-based approaches are good at measuring access and use, and to some extent self-reported levels of confidence with aspects of critical media literacy (e.g. whether young people consider that they fully understand certain aspects of risk). However, they are inadequate for the assessment of detailed critical understanding, and the quality (as opposed to quantity) of user-generated content.

Accordingly, the remainder of this paper will address the issue of evaluation in educational contexts, where at least media educators have the advantages of more consensus about what is happening, a better-defined population, and a tradition of pedagogic tools for assessment.

Existing practices of assessment

Undoubtedly, evaluation is one of the weakest aspects of the international media education tradition. Even where media education is strongest in Europe, it looks as though educational instruments for measuring it are ill-defined, weakly-applied and inconsistent, if they exist at all. I am best-qualified to speak of the UK system, so will use this as an example. Instruments of assessment are clearest where media education (in the form of Media Studies and Film Studies) exist as public examination courses for the ages 14 to 19. As suggested above, even this area faces the perennial problems of the dominance of language as a mode of critical expression and the difficulty of assessing creative work in its own right. In addition, examination systems and formal curricula are slow to change, so that, with some notable exceptions, these exams in the UK largely address “old media”, and are still struggling with computer games and internet cultures.

Across the wider context of schooling, there is very little clear idea of how to evaluate media literacy with all students (Media Studies and Film Studies are optional subjects of course) from the ages of 5 to 16. This can be seen in two ways.
Firstly, **what is it that is to be evaluated** in any given instance? Suppose it is a young person’s video production (and moving image education is undoubtedly the strongest tradition across Europe). Is it evaluated as evidence of conceptual understanding, or creative competence? And what might these mean? Both are subject to wide differences of definition, as we shall see below. Some time ago, a study of filmmaking in the informal educational sector in the UK observed that no real consensus existed among educators, and called for an evaluative matrix to clarify what might be evaluated, so that those who work on media arts projects with young people might get beyond the celebratory mode typical of such work and detect how much progress young people had actually made. More recently, the BFI has led a study (reported in the Paris seminar) which showed that schools were still very unclear about what outcomes could be claimed from media education projects, and how sustained the effects were over time.

Another issue here, highlighted in the Paris seminar by Ian Wall and Patrick Verniers, is the well-known conflict of process and product. No doubt media educators at the Congress will find it relatively easy to agree that evaluation and assessment mechanisms need to attend to both of these; but as all educators are aware, when it comes to mandatory state assessment mechanisms, product wins out every time. How, then, do we properly attend to process?

Secondly, evaluation and assessment can be seen as a question of **learning progression**. In 2004, the education regulator for England, OFSTED, observed:

> Furthermore, in both drama and media study, insufficient attention is given to progression, with students doing similar activities and demonstrating similar skills from year to year, such as “freeze-frames” and “hot-seating” in drama, and simple storyboards or advertisements in media work. It remains rare for secondary schools, either individually or working with their primary feeder schools, to consider in any detail how students’ media literacy is developed through the English or wider curriculum.


From this perspective, evaluation is less to do with the absolute qualities of any outcome, and more to do with its quality relative to an earlier outcome. In this respect, my own research centre is undertaking a study of learning progression in media literacy, which will compare similar processes across different ages (from 5 to 16), and students’ work from one year to the next, to see what might be expected of students at different ages. At present, the main problem is that there is no sense of learning progression across the age range in media literacy in the UK (and, perhaps, in most other member states). There is no sense of what we might reasonably expect a 5 year old to do with a film narrative, or what they might produce as their own piece of film, as compared with what we might expect of an 8-year-old, an 11 year-old, a 14-year-old. The issue here is not to do with standardized benchmarking —fixed points of measurement which dictate, in an ages-and-stages approach, what children should have learned by when. Rather, it is how we might develop a model of recursive learning in media literacy similar to the models typical of print literacy. We would expect it to be uneven, cyclical, and to oscillate between abstract and concrete understandings and practices. The model here, rather than centrally-determined determinations of progression, is Engeström’s “expansive cycles: “the key feature of expansive cycles is that they are definitely not prede-
terminated courses of one-dimensional development. What is more advanced, “which way is up”, cannot be decided using externally given fixed yardsticks. Those decisions are made locally, within the expansive cycles themselves, under conditions of uncertainty and intensive search (1999).”

Most of all, as we move away from a patchy experience of isolated examples of media education in children’s lives towards a progressive, structured provision, we need an approach to evaluation which will be adequate to this. As Thierry de Smedt argued in his summary of the Brussels seminar, we need to promote the construction of pedagogical tools; “the structural should be favoured as opposed to the one-shot approach.”

Models and debates: what are we trying to evaluate?

However, all such efforts necessarily involve debates about the nature of media literacy itself. In the experts’ feedback to the Paris seminar, Mike Cushman called for a move from descriptive approaches to analysis: for models, frameworks, taxonomies. While debates about such models can be seen as unhelpfully obscure, we need some idea of what it is that we are trying to evaluate; and behind the media literacy initiatives of Europe there are some critical fault-lines. I summarise these under five headings.

— Protection to Preparation. Thierry de Smedt’s summary of the Paris seminar1 refers helpfully to a variety of models of media education; and these include the persistence of the protectionist model. While we are all familiar with this, and with the media education arguments against it, there is no doubt that it persists, not least in the emphasis on internet risk in the EC’s funding in recent years. So, media educators argue that media education should move from protection to preparation for adult life (notably David Buckingham, 2003), and we need to consider what it is that we are evaluating in such preparation, and how, if there is a need to assess levels of risk awareness, we keep this in proportion and do not allow it to dominate.

— Film education vs. Media Education. Undoubtedly, the film heritages of the member states play a significant role in the development of media education in Europe. The traditional problem here lies in the questions of cultural capital and critical understanding. If what we are trying to impart to young people is an appreciation of their national film heritage, then the instruments of evaluation will look very similar to those used in different member states to assess young people’s appreciation of their literary, artistic and musical heritages. By the same token, these instruments of assessment would expect young people to dismiss the popular cinematic offerings of Hollywood. Media Studies and Cultural Studies approaches, by contrast, would expect almost the reversal of these values. Clearly, film educators and media educators are part of the media literacy enterprise, and are well-acustomed to finding common purposes and compromise solutions.

But in this case, we need some clarity about broad and generous cultural and critical objectives if we are to be clear about what we are evaluating.

- **Old Media vs. New Media.** This question has been raised by several commentators throughout the seminars. Are we teaching, and therefore evaluating, an understanding and creative engagement with the cultural histories of film, print media and radio; or with online gaming and the participatory internet? It is likely that many participants in this congress will agree that we should aim to do both. The challenge here is to rethink the conceptual apparatus needed (assuming that this is an essential part of what is to be taught and assessed). How do familiar concepts of media audiences, texts and institutions change? How might we want young people to explore the idea of audience as game-player? Institution as wiki? Text as SMS? Consumer as producer?

- **E-Learning vs. Media Literacy.** There is no sense that this conflict is a problem in our seminars. Yet is it a policy problem for Europe more generally. The argument about the convergence of old and new media can easily become a view of media literacy as synonymous with information literacy: a generalised ability to ‘decode’ information in digital form. If this was what is to be taught, then we would assess access, technical competence, and information retrieval skills. Questions of broader cultural, critical and creative competence would be largely irrelevant. While this may not be a problem for our congress, it is a message we can send to the European policy forums that we maintain a critical distinction between these two domains.

- **The 3 Cs model of media literacy (cultural, critical, creative).** I will organise my final remarks on evaluation of learning progression under these headings, because they seem to me the best framework for consensus in Europe, reflecting the European Media Literacy Charter, as well as some aspects of the EC’s recent communication on media literacy. This model is not a solution —indeed, it is so broad as to contain many possible contradictions— but it can be at least a common point of departure. One point to observe, however, is that these three dimensions of media literacy inter-penetrate: cultural engagement can also be critical; creative work can also be conceptual, and so on.

**Evaluating the three C’s**

**Cultural**

Firstly, then, progression in cultural development. Needless to say, this cannot be constrained by ages and stages. Nevertheless, there will be development. The social interests of 8-12 year-old girls, for instance, are often characterised as aspirational, motivated by an interest in the obscure attractions of adolescence, the changing nature of gendered identity, and beyond, the forbidden fruits of adolescence (Richards, 1995; Willett, 2006). These kinds of changing cultural interest will find expression in, for example, the way teenagers might learn about sexuality from magazines and soap operas (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003).

Also, we know that children and young people develop certain aspects of media literacy through their own engagement with the media outside school; with popular cinema, computer games, social softwares. In a debate about media literacy a few years ago, part of the Digital Generations international conference (Institute of Education, 2004), the media researcher Mimi Ito represented this aspect of media literacy succinctly:
Now the second point that I want to bring up is that this fluency that kids are exhibiting, it’s an extremely high level form of literacy, not necessarily the kind of content that educators are interested in, but it happens in a natural social ecology, much like kids learn spoken language. So the analogue is closer to learning spoken language than written language, Math or Science. So kids can master highly… complex content within peer-to-peer social ecologies and I think that an important lesson from an educational perspective is that media literacies perhaps are learned most effectively in the naturally occurring peer-to-peer social ecologies.

This kind of fluency is something we need to meet halfway, and recognise as far as we can. And, like any other aspect of literacy, it is ever-changing, quite regardless of what we do in schools. Children will at some point acquire a mobile phone, a playstation console, a computer in their bedroom; they will develop specific tastes in different media forms and genres; they will negotiate the regulatory regimes that seek to protect them from certain kinds of content.

At the same time, this kind of development and expansion will meet the school culture of media literacy, if it is there to be met, in what Gutierrez et al. call “the third space”, where the cultural worlds of student and teacher come into contact (1995). Ideally, this is a kind of dialogue between cultures. While the lived culture of media pleasures might be central to work of media educators, we also have a role in deepening historical understanding of media cultures, and in introducing students to the kinds of evaluative commentary which surround culturally valued texts. It is here, perhaps, that some accommodation can be found between the media educator’s valuing of popular cultural texts, and the film educator’s mission to promote national film heritages.

Clearly, the idea of assessing cultural development, the heterogeneous cultural tastes of young people, or the cultural values implicit in them, is fraught with difficulty. Yet some kind of qualitative monitoring of commitment to a cultural disposition, tolerance and empathy with those of others, a broadening of cultural horizons, seems something the Congress could consider. Perhaps most important is to raise the question of the cultural aspect of media literacy and how to overcome the contradictions it poses.

Critical

Secondly, progression will be critical. It is easy enough to imagine that children might arrive in the classroom completely un-critical, and that education will furnish them with the necessary critical skills; and indeed, this has often been a dominant rationale for media education, and remains so in some respects. Recent research shows, for instance, that young people find certain aspects of the internet confusing — how search engines work, or what the legal status of downloadable music might be. (Cramner, 2006; De Smedt et al., 2006).

However, this is not to say that children do arrive in classrooms in some state of ideal critical “innocence”. Indeed, they may have well-developed critical senses in some respects. As Buckingham argues (2003), by secondary age they are likely to be well aware that advertising functions to sell them products and ideas, that media fictions are constructions rather than realities, and that the value of media texts is at least partly a matter of taste. However, the movement from more subjective engagement with media cultures to a more objective critical understanding is by no means linear, or entirely predictable. We have seen that it can only take place in the meeting-place between the students’ cultures and the teach-
ers’; but of course the students’ cultural experiences are themselves heterogeneous. If a progression of critical understanding depends partly on understanding how other people interpret and value different media texts and cultures, then, as Engeström argues (1999), this kind of expansive learning must be horizontal as well as vertical — to progress, it must look across cultural divisions in its own community.

Perhaps critical understanding is the easiest to map onto models of progression, and relate to conventional tools of assessment. As I have argued above, it is often conceptual understanding that formal curricula seek to teach most explicitly, and assessment criteria seek to assess. Nevertheless, there remains a fault-line between how we understand “critical understanding” in relation to the cultural forms of the arts (including film); and how we understand it in relation to the media. The familiar form of critical understanding of media texts, institutions and audiences can be seen as a “rhetorics” of the media: a critical grasp of its rhetorical strategies. More typical of arts and literature education [and film education], is a “poetics” — a critical understanding of aesthetic form and effect. Needless to say, these two need each other, or the rhetorics becomes detached from sensory experience, and the aesthetic depoliticised.

The practical challenge for evaluation is, perhaps, to do with the semiotic modes in which these forms of critical understanding and appreciation are assessed. What is the place of language (especially the traditional expository or analytical essay)? Does language offer particular affordances for the construction of the forms of argument needed for critical exposition? Should we look more closely at other modes to see what they can offer?

Creative

Finally, progression can be seen as creative. There is a good consensus among media educators that conceptual development in media literacy needs to happen through production work, not just as an adjunct to it. The obvious way in which this might happen is to imagine that practical work rehearses and consolidates abstract conceptual ideas; and in some ways, this is what may be happening in sites of learning across Europe. It is difficult for children to really understand what it means for their work to address an audience unless they repeatedly have the experience of seeing people view their films in a local cinema, or respond to their game designs on the internet. It is difficult to grasp what a media institution might be like without imaginatively inhabiting it through simulation or roleplay. It is, arguably, impossible to conceptualise the structures of media texts without some opportunity to manipulate them.

However, a more startling view of how such progression might work is Engeström’s notion of “the dialectics of ascending from the abstract to the concrete” (1999). Contrary to the conventional assumption (and the Piagetian model of conceptual development), this argument proposes that the cycle of learning might begin with a simple abstract idea and progress, through the manipulation of semiotic tools and the creation of artefacts which is central to Vygotsky’s notion of development (1931/1998), to more complex and sophisticated ideas. An example of this can be seen in my own book on Media Literacy (Burn and Durran, 2007, chapter 3). In an animation of the fairytale of Red Riding Hood made by eighty-year-old children, the concepts introduced to them by the teacher of shot type, while in one sense new and challenging, were also abstract and partial. Only when the specific images of the wolf’s rotating head and rumbling stomach constructed from plasticine by the children did the notion
of how form and content meet to produce rich and complex representations become evident. What we have called an “oscillation” between internal imaginative and conceptual work and external production continues, then, throughout the span of children’s educational lives, as long, that is, as there are sufficient opportunities for it to grow.

There are many possible approaches to consider in terms of evaluating creative production. One strategy is simply to refuse it: to concentrate our efforts on critical understanding expressed in essays, and leave creative work to a state of glorious anarchy. Another is to subsume the creative to the critical — evaluate it only as evidence of conceptual understanding. A third would be the technical competence approach: to evaluate it as evidence of proficiency in certain defined skills. A fourth would be an aesthetic approach: close to the poetics I have outlined above. A fifth might be a developmental approach: using Vygotsky’s model of creativity in adolescence, this would consider the ways in which cultural resources had been imaginatively transformed, and how such transformations were rationally organised in coherent form. Many more are possible, perhaps. It is transparently the case that the order of approaches I have laid out here represent a hierarchy of my own preferences. I expect a vigorous debate from the Congress.

**Evaluation for whom?**

Finally, we should consider, if evaluation is important, who is it important for, and how does this shape its form? Among the stakeholders identified at various points in the three seminars are educators; parents; community groups; policymakers; the media industries. If these groups all need to know what levels of media literacy have been achieved, what is it that they need to know? Do they need different information about different aspects of media literacy? Do parents and policymakers need information more about critical abilities, while the “creative” industries need information about creative abilities? Do they need written reports, grades, profiles, portfolios? How do we construct the criteria in a way which represents a consensus across the community of media educators in Europe yet is intelligible within the traditional of educational evaluation in the different member states? Perhaps most importantly, how much weight should we place on the interests of these different stakeholders compared with the interests of the young people and children themselves? Is evaluation really about a measured progression towards a future citizenship; or is it about the child’s expressive needs of the moment — how to make a better film, comic, game now? The policy-makers of Europe need to recognize, perhaps, that many purposes of creative work in media education are not principally oriented to future goals, competences or identities, but to the expressive needs of the moment. In this sense, children’s uses of media literacy are exactly like those of adults. They are more interested in the job in hand, in what they can say now with the tools available. How do we reconcile these apparently contradictory rationales?

No clear answers exist to these problems. The Congress can perhaps begin to map the way towards a common approach.

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When we mention the issue of protecting minors from the dangers of images and the media, we immediately think of the recommendations of the Board of Film Classification. These are obviously welcome, as are those of the PEGI system for classifying video games. Parents and education professionals who follow these recommendations are not only protecting children from images that might distress them, but also socialising them within a system of collective laws by asking them to join them in conforming to laws set by others. In brief, they are showing them that adults do not prohibit or authorise things solely depending on their personal convictions or mood, but that they know how to abide by the opinion of those who are better informed—in this case a Board composed of specialists in different fields. But where the media are concerned, the danger today does not simply consist of dangerous spectacles or harmful encounters. Firstly, for the very young, there exists a violence in images that is independent of the content of the programmes. However, at the same time, we now are threatened by the risk of a generational rift between children who are enthusiastic about new technologies and adults who mistrust them, or even denigrate them. In order to prevent this risk, we have to return to the purpose of all education: to help a child to become an adult, which means helping them to be capable one day of self-management and self-protection.

**Self-protection and self-management**

Every adult is in principle capable of two complementary attitudes: protecting themselves from anything that might be harmful to their physical or mental health, and choosing their orientations in a way that is consistent with their personal choices. The first of these two attitudes corresponds to the capacity for self-protection, and comes under the process of internalisation.
of maternal functions — which in reality may be achieved by a man as well as by a woman. The second corresponds to the capacity for self-management, and this comes under the process of internalisation of paternal functions — which in reality may be achieved by a woman as well as by a man. Without the possibility of self-protection and self-management, no freedom is possible. These two functions are not only complementary, but also closely interwoven: in the act of managing oneself, there obviously exists the capacity not to place oneself in danger; and conversely, self-protection contains an element of self-orientation.

The child is not capable of either of these; this is why it must be protected and guided. However, let us not forget that these two objectives are subordinate to a third: autonomy. Education consists of helping the child to grow — this is the objective that should take priority over all others. In education, the goal is not so much to protect the child as to teach it how to protect itself, and it is less a case of directing it than allowing it to orient itself later in the various circumstances of its life. Of course, in the case of very young children, it is the act of protection that dominates, but the more the child grows, the more it is important to explain to it how what is expected of it forms part of the orientations that it will be subsequently led to develop on its own. Protection becomes explanatory; it allows the child to internalise the meaning of prohibitions that are imposed on it and the advice it receives. In this way, the child progresses little by little from a world where protection is dominant to another world in which it orients and protects itself.

We can see that in matters of child protection, the question of age is essential. The same protective attitude may be educational at a certain age and counter-educational at another, or, to use a neologism, it may be “developmental” or “anti-developmental”. This is why it is essential to inform parents of the necessity of giving the age of the child the utmost consideration when exposing it to the various media.

The “3-6-9-12” rule

So that the child may gain the maximum benefit from access to the screen, it is necessary to allow it access at the correct time. To this end, I have proposed a rule that is easy to understand and apply; I have called it the “3-6-9-12” rule. In practice, this rule means: no access to the screen before age three, no personal games console before age six, no supervised Internet access before age nine, and no unsupervised Internet access before age twelve (or before moving up to secondary school).

No access to the screen before age 3

Since 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics has advised against putting children aged less than two in front of the television, and asks that older children should not be exposed for more than two hours per day (American Academy of Pediatrics, Media Education, 1999). Indeed, many studies show that a child aged less than three gains nothing from using the television... even if those who make TV for babies say otherwise! Television retards language (Zimmerman F.J. et al., 2005), it impedes development even when it is just “background noise” and the baby is not watching it (Pempeck T. et al., 2008), and excessive use in early childhood promotes excess weight at school age (Dennison Barbara A., 2002). In the young child, protection against the disadvantages of the screen consists firstly of not being exposed to it!
This is why, on 18 October 2007 — in other words two days after the initial broadcasts by the Baby First network in France — I launched a petition against television for babies, insisting on the fact that it is a problem for public health. This petition was relayed by the member associations of CIEM (Inter-association Collective for Childhood and the Media), then by the CSA (Higher Council on Audiovisual media) and the Ministry of Health. Thus it is that, since the 1st of November 2008, distributors have been obliged to make their subscribers aware of a warning. This is obviously only the beginning, and it is now necessary for the European authorities to take this threat on board, so that public authorities everywhere may be on guard against the dangers of television for babies.

No personal games console before age 6

Computer games are highly attractive, and as soon as they are introduced into the child’s life, they rapidly monopolise all its attention. This obviously takes place at the expense of other activities, in particular those manual learning processes that are vital to the development of those parts of the brain that are responsible for three-dimensional perception. It is therefore better to prevent the child from having a personal games console before age 6.

No supervised Internet access before age 9

Use of the Internet does not only confront the child with the risk of encountering images with ultraviolent or pornographic content. It also constantly interferes with two forms of reference point that the child is in the process of constructing and which are indispensable to it: the distinction between private space and public space and the notion of point of view. The first is not acquired until around the 7th or 8th year, and it is essential for putting into perspective documents found on the Internet or deciding on what one may show there concerning oneself. As for the concept of point of view, it makes it possible to comprehend that a number of people may have different points of view on the same subject. Here again, the notion is indispensable if a child is going to use the Internet without danger.

No unsupervised Internet access before age 12

When the child gets older, the protection offered to the young child must be accompanied by a speech inviting it not only not to do certain things, but also to put into words the reasons for which it will have to learn to protect itself from them. The protection given to the child must be careful indeed not to pit its weakness against the supposed strength of the adult. In particular, it is better never to tell the child that it is forbidden to watch certain programmes “because he/she is still little” and that they are “reserved for grown-ups” — this will produce

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1. www.squiggle.be/tisseron. Launched on 18 October, this petition received the support of nearly 30,000 users and almost all the associations of professionals working with very young children.

2. “This is a message from the Higher Council on Audiovisual media and the Ministry of Health: watching television may restrict development in children aged under three, even when this involves networks aimed specifically at them.” In the same way, all non screen-based communication media (such as subscribers’ journals, Internet, etc.) must include this note: “Watching television, including networks presented as being specifically designed for children aged less than three, may lead to developmental problems such as passivity, delayed speech, agitation, sleeping disorders, problems with concentration and dependence on screens.”
the exact opposite effect. In its desire to be “big”, the child will hasten to watch what is forbidden to it in order to prove to itself that it is not as young as the grown-up thinks!

With the same sort of idea, it is best to avoid all forms of “espionage” consisting, for example, of surreptitiously looking at the websites a young person has visited. This attitude risks making children even more secretive and encouraging them to no longer speak about their various activities on the Internet... “Since you’re spying on me, you don’t need me to tell you what I’m doing”. What’s more, if parents discover, by these means, a problem that worries them, they don’t really know how to intervene...

On this subject, I remember some parents who had discovered by this method that their adolescent son was visiting homosexual sites. This practice worried them, but the way in which they had discovered it made intervention a delicate matter: they would have been obliged to reveal to their child that they had been spying on him for quite some time: after that, it is somewhat difficult to expect to establish a dialogue based on trust! They felt unable to keep quiet, even less able to say anything! I could only say to them: “What a shame that you didn’t come to see me sooner; I would have suggested that you try to protect your son against the risks he was running on the Internet by going about things differently!”

As for parental control software intended to protect minors against dangerous sites, parents should inform the child about this, while explaining two equally important things: firstly, they should tell it that the software has been installed because they want to protect it. However, they should also add that these software packages are unfortunately not very effective! Thus warned, the child who encounters a pornographic site despite the protective software will find it easier to talk about it. On the other hand, if its parents have told it that this risk is impossible thanks to the “super-filter” that they have purchased, the child will ask itself how it can get round this protection... or will not dare tell its parents that they have bought an ineffective system. So in the end, the parents must know that some of these filters may prevent their child from meeting the expectations of its teachers by blocking sites that are necessary for its schoolwork: the child must also be told of this...and disconnect the filter as a family!

A rule that is necessary, but insufficient

Although the “3-6-9-12” rule is necessary to offer a framework to puzzled parents, it is evidently not sufficient in itself to protect children from the dangers of images. Supervising time spent on line, at all ages, is essential. Between the ages of 3 and 5, the child has nothing to gain by spending more than an hour per day in front of a screen. What is more, the child must benefit from an education that provides it with theoretical reference points in order to understand the conditions for the production of the various media (especially where video games are concerned), and also their various uses (for example, all the current uses of photography).

Pre-education regarding images from nursery school age

Keeping children away from the screen should be the rule; however, although a number of studies show that babies gain nothing from watching television, many parents are tempted to use it as a “baby-sitter”. It is therefore essential to introduce activities that allow young children to take a step back from this excessive premature exposure to the screen. We have proposed and trialled one such activity; we will briefly present the principle and the results.
Television prevents play and suspends early identification processes

A baby has many things to learn and very little time. Fortunately, it has two means at its disposal for this purpose: imitation of what it sees, and play, which allows it to replay situations that it has experienced by using toys — and in particular its “security blankets”. In these games, it is the baby itself that invents the stories that it tells, and, for this, it identifies alternately with each of the central objects in the situations it is imagining: a simple pebble that the child “drives” along an imaginary road allows it to identify successively with the driver, the vehicle or the obstacle, just as well as any expensive plastic toy car. And the same is true of group games.

But when a child under three years of age watches the television, everything seems so incomprehensible that the child seeks above all to find reference points on which to rely; for this, it very often chooses to fix its attention on the character that seems closest to the child itself in its reactions. And since the heroes of these series are somewhat stereotyped, the child always ends up identifying with the same model: the one in command, or indeed the one who receives the orders, the one who searches or the one who is sought, or the one who hits or the one who is hit. By always identifying with the same “hero” profile, children then run the risk of reinforcing an exclusive relational register. In practice, they acquire the habit of perceiving themselves in one single way, as aggressor, as victim, or as righter of wrongs. The danger is that they then systematically adopt the same attitude in the real world.

This is why the danger of television, for very young children, is not the adoption of those models presented as the most gratifying, as is the case with older children. This would suppose that the very young child understands the relational and narrative issues contained in what it sees and clearly perceives the gratification associated with the behaviour of the various protagonists in the story. The danger for the child resides in the fact that using the screen freezes its identificatory development: it gradually acquires the habit of seeing itself always in a single role. Furthermore, television use reduces the time devoted to spontaneous play, which would rightly make it possible to reduce this risk. Television has locked the child in a prison made of self-reinforcing behaviour patterns.

Prevention by role-playing in nursery school

A research programme that we carried out in 2007 and 2008 showed that this situation is not an accident. Role-playing activities, led by teaching staff in nursery schools, in accordance with a very precise protocol called “the three figures game”, make it possible to combat the tendency in children to adopt at an early age a favoured identification in which they become locked. But this is on condition that they are invited to play out the situations in the images that have disturbed them, not only according to their choice, but also by inviting them to play each of the roles successively: aggressor, victim or righter of wrongs. In this way, those who have a tendency to shut themselves into certain profiles — especially the postures of aggressor and victim — are invited to experience other possible positions and experiment with them.

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They free themselves from their ingrain ed identifications and find room for manoeuvre—or, to put it another way, for freedom—without any of them being stigmatised.

The adolescent and the Internet: understanding in order to guide

The best way of organising prevention concerning the dangers of the Internet consists of identifying and naming everything our children look for there…and everything they risk finding there. This way of proceeding presents the dangers as a consequence of the advantages and preserves the intergenerational dialogue on the theme of the screen. For this purpose, it is essential to understand what causes young people to go on the Internet. In my opinion, they do it to satisfy at least six desires: to explore multiple identities, to highlight their intimate experiences, to build their self-esteem in a permanent oscillation between attachment to a group and glorification of individualism, to produce their own images, to travel in a world in which everyone can attach their desired level of importance to everything, and finally to establish an intimate and inter-subjective relationship with machines. All these desires are legitimate and must be promoted, but at the same time they all contain dangers against which young people must be put on their guard.

Exploring multiple identities

For the adolescent, playing with a number of identities—especially by creating several blogs—is firstly a way of trying to find themselves. This attitude even has a central role in the construction of the self around the time of puberty. It allows the adolescent to determine what Levi-Strauss called “the virtual seat of the personality”. We all have only a single identity, but we are condemned to ignorance of it. There exists only the option of trying to determine it by means of the multiple and successive identities that we submit to our circle of friends.

The discourse on prevention of the possible dangers of false identities on the Internet must therefore firstly highlight the advantages. It is also essential to tell young people that it is normal to want face-to-face meetings with strangers that they have met on the Internet. This is proof of good psychic health and a way of avoiding being isolated in virtual worlds while losing touch with reality. However, this obviously involves some risk, and this is why the adult is there to accompany the young person to any meetings they may desire. On the other hand, if the teacher or parent seeks to protect the young person by telling them never to meet people they have met on the Internet face to face, it is then that they risk actually doing it, in secret and under the worst possible conditions! However, as we have seen, the main problem is not so much that of young people who play with multiple identities than that of those who never reach this stage because they are prematurely fixed in an exclusive identification…

Highlighting one’s intimate experiences

It is wrong to talk of exhibitionism when describing putting oneself on display on the Internet. The exhibitionist actually only shows that part of himself that he knows will certainly fascinate his audience. He is a sort of repetitive poseur who takes pleasure in a set ritual. On the other hand, these young people run the risk of engaging in new experiences in which they exteriorise certain elements of their lives that have hitherto been kept secret, so as to discover
themselves better through the view of others. We have called this process the “desire for extimacy”: it allows the creation of a richer intimacy and new connections, and like intimacy plays a part in building self-esteem.

The risk of excessive exposure of oneself still exists, however. In order to prevent this, it would be necessary to teach the distinction between intimate space and public space, starting in primary school, all the more so since it is constantly being blurred by “reality” TV, docufiction and people-politics. A simple exercise allows children to measure the risks that the Internet may cause to weigh on their intimate lives. They are asked to imagine the page that they would like to put on Facebook, then they are invited to write down everything they are thinking about posting and then go out into the road or simply into the playground. The majority will exclaim: “But that’s impossible, it’s intimate”, and then it’s not too difficult to explain to them that the Internet is a much busier place. And then let’s not forget to place this inscription on top of all our computers: “Anything you write here may fall into the public domain”.

The herd instinct and “googleisation” of self-esteem
The building of self-esteem on the Internet takes place both through attachment to a group —the new social networks— and through glorification of individualism. The first of these movements sometimes produces a tendency towards the herd instinct characteristic of adolescence, but the second contains a more serious danger, which I have called the “googleisation” of relational life. Just as the Google system classifies pieces of information according to the number of times they have been consulted, young people sometimes prefer to enjoy a large number of ironic or shocking comments rather than a small number of laudatory comments…

There exists a means of preventing these two risks: by alternating, in class, individual exercises and group exercises on the Internet.

Machinima, Pocket Films and the right of personal portrayal
Today, young people are producing their own images increasingly early, notably Machinima (filmed in the interior of a video game or virtual universe) and Pocket films (shown on mobile telephones). We must obviously encourage and promote these productions, and not hesitate to entrust young people with responsibilities and budgets so they may organise their own festivals and meetings that highlight and promote these productions. This is the best way to combat the risk of a generational rift! At the same time, however, it is important to promote amongst them their own right of personal portrayal and that of others, by teaching them always to ask two questions when they see a camera pointing towards them: “You must ask for my permission before photographing or filming me” and “What are you going to do with my image?”

“Neither true nor false, it’s me who decides”
With digital technologies, we have passed from a world in which images on screens were produced in indicial mode (they gave a representation of the world) to one in which they are manufactured in digital mode (they reconstruct the/a world). As a result, the proportions of

reality and fiction contained in each image have become undecidable, and parents must inform their children of this at a very early stage. This is true of “reality” television and docufiction, but also often of advertising disguised as information. This is why protection in this field must teach children to be wary of hidden advertising, and also to check the sources of the information that they find. From this point of view, it is helpful to hold classroom exercises in which children seek an answer regarding a subject with the aid of the Internet. Each of them comes back with different information: it’s a way of discovering that you should never believe everything you find on the Internet without verifying it!

**An intimate relationship with machines**

Young people have a desire to develop an intimate intersubjective relationship with their communicating objects. This desire must be put to good use in order to encourage the supervised use of the tools that they use: games consoles, MP3 players, and mobile telephones. This may make it possible to remotivate every pupil, to develop advanced skills such as the spirit of initiative and a capacity for cooperation, and finally to prepare these future citizens for the consequences of the virtual world as part of society. However, at the same time, in order to prevent any misunderstanding, it is essential to explain to children that there exist two very different forms of learning: traditional classroom learning, based on the hypothetico-deductive method, and media-based learning via information and communication technologies, in which trial and error play a central role.

**In conclusion**

The new media are turning transmission systems upside down. It is no longer parents who are responsible for passing information on to children according to the usual downward model. To this, we may also add horizontal forms of transmission between peers and even upward forms of transmission from the youngest to the eldest. And in order to prevent a generational rift in the ICT world, it is better to invite young people to get to know the advantages involved so as to evade the pitfalls, rather than the other way round. But above all, the dangers of the Internet are so numerous and unpredictable that we are no longer able to dream of building a world in which children run no risk whatsoever. On the other contrary, we must make them capable of facing up to all the risks… but with a maximum amount of precautions. And in order to achieve this, we must no longer wish to protect them against real or supposed dangers, but protect them with them, that is to say with their participation.

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Bibliography


Key Questions
It ought to be obvious that only one set of interests lies at the centre of any educational enterprise: the interests of the learner. But of course in the world of educational policy-making, different configurations of agencies and different political priorities offer different opportunities for us as media literacy advocates. We cannot ignore the advantages of working with specific policy agendas, corporate sponsors and funding streams, if we are to develop the research, resources, training and provision that are needed in order to raise the profile of education for media literacy. At the same time however, we have to address the potential disadvantages of attaching media literacy to particular sets of interests. Once this happens, media literacy risks becoming subordinate to those interests and becoming either marginalised or distorted, or both.

This paper identifies seven areas of interest to specific sectors or agencies, each of which offers media educators the temptation of a simple rationale for their work together with the possibility of support and funding. We need to consider these areas, not as a matter of comfortable academic debate about which we may prefer, or how best each can be “delivered”, but in terms of their risks as well as their promises.

While media literacy remains a relatively small and marginal sector, practitioners may well be forced to emphasise just one of these areas at the expense of the others, in order to pursue funding or establish a foothold in policy. While this may seem sensible or even laudable, it exacerbates the confused public perceptions of media literacy and can even contribute to lowering its status in the policy context. It must also be recognised that some sectors or agencies may well have an additional interest in excluding other aspects of media literacy that they perceive as contrary to their interests.

**Whose interests should media literacy serve?**
Digital Inclusion

This is currently the hot topic that threatens to shoulder aside media literacy as we have known it. What could be more important than ensuring that every citizen has access to the online services that give them unprecedented access not only to information but also to other people and places, and provide opportunities for expressing and circulating their own ideas? From a media educator’s point of view there are some obvious flaws in this argument. Firstly, the “digital inclusion” agenda regards digital media as neutral tools: for example it will be asserted that Google simply “provides” information, and that “information” equates to “knowledge”.

Secondly, the real drivers of the digital inclusion agenda are the hardware and software industries in alliance with governments who are seeking to cut the cost of bureaucracy. Neither party to this alliance has much interest in developing citizens’ critical skills or broadening the cultural experiences available to them. The line that needs to be taken by media educators who choose to align themselves with this agenda is that of emphasising the potential of digital media to support active citizenship, grass-roots politics and a power-shift away from big media producers and rights-owners, towards individuals and smaller groups and the concept of “creative commons”.

Self-Regulation

Regulators and policymakers have to negotiate the tricky dual responsibility of not only encouraging citizens to embrace the latest technologies with enthusiasm, but at the same time ensuring that they are protected from media intrusions such as invasions of privacy by advertisers, cyber bullying or potentially offensive media content. Calling this “media literacy” and expecting people to regulate themselves is one way out of the dilemma, but it reduces media literacy to a relatively narrow set of gate keeping routines. Unfortunately, regulators and policymakers are likely to welcome a simplified and narrow agenda for media literacy, given that they inevitably favour simple (and cheap) solutions, and that they have a clear interest in encouraging the development of a strong digital economy.

Some media literacy advocates make similar arguments but point to practice that involves much wider range of activity. Learners’ individual and informal engagement with the media and their consequent issues about choices of content (for viewing/listening/playing) may be addressed, as may their critical skills in identifying and analysing media content to which they object. In the context of production work they may also cover issues of ethics and copyright as an aspect of exercising personal responsibility. There is therefore nothing wrong with this approach in principle, but it is the voices of regulators and policymakers that are more likely to be heard, and the narrower, simpler agenda is thus more likely to be promoted.

Citizenship and human rights

For many media educators, this is their core business: ensuring that learners acquire the critical tools to interrogate media content, to reject bias and stereotyping, and to raise awareness of the patterns of ownership and influence that drive the production and distribution of media content. For some this extends to the creative process of making alternative media content, or of using media to challenge rights abuses. In many countries the media and even government have a vested interest in not supporting this rather more disruptive or subversive aspect of media
education, and consequently regulators are also likely to be lukewarm about it, even though it might be thought an important part of their remit. If support is available at all in these contexts, it is from NGOs who are unlikely to provide extensive or long term funding.

An extension of this approach could be concerned with citizens’ rights to cultural goods and diversity of cultural choice, but many media educators neglect this aspect, focusing exclusively on the mainstream media content that is available, and tending to neglect non-mainstream media content which is harder to access. This approach can also offer a narrow media literacy agenda that neglects questions of personal pleasure and imaginative possibilities.

Creativity and Production

This is increasingly presented and promoted as what media literacy is all about. Sponsors of every kind have no trouble in funding production projects —especially those involving children and young people— which claim to express their views and demonstrate their creativity, and may offer the added advantage of showing off the capabilities of various software and hardware packages. For media companies in particular that can be a convenient way of displaying an interest in media literacy while dispensing with the inconvenience of encouraging critical analysis that might be negative. Although funding of production work is a popular option for sponsors, too many choose a short-term initiative such as a competition, rather than investing in a longer-term —but perhaps lower profile — project that would allow learners to improve on their first efforts and to develop their skills over time.

A number of issues continue to arise in relation to creative production activity that takes place under the banner of “media literacy”, which are exacerbated by the lack of longer-term funding or planning. The actual extent of learners’ conscious, personal creative decisions may be very unclear: often the work that is thought to be “difficult” or “boring” [such as editing] is done by professionals, including the addition of powerful sound tracks that can substantially increase the impact of a badly-made film. Learners often have no opportunity to practise or develop their craft by having repeated opportunities for making media. And all too often learners embark on a particular genre of media production without ever having had the opportunity to analyse examples of the genre and to consider how their product will relate to them. Even amongst media educators, views about what kinds of production work are appropriate in different contexts or with different age groups can vary widely, and younger children’s capabilities are often underestimated.

The development of creativity and production as a key aspect of media literacy is clearly enormously important, but we should beware of uncritically adopting the corporate hype that claims it is simple and accessible to everyone. We should also resist the tendency to see media production work only as an apprenticeship for professional work in the media. It should be valued as an important set of skills that everyone should be able to learn.

A Multicultural Approach

Education for media literacy can easily be seen as a vehicle to develop understanding of different world cultures and to reduce community tensions. Learners can use the internet to publish and exchange accounts of lifestyles and experiences in different countries and cultures. Audiovisual texts can transcend linguistic boundaries. People in different places around the world can
participate in games or use conferencing software to experience cross-cultural collaboration and dialogue. The experience of collective production work by a multicultural group of learners can in itself promote understanding. Any of these approaches may be used by teachers, community workers and other educators to try and build social cohesion and to lessen tensions between ethnic and/or religious groups. Media educators may invoke these approaches in order to secure funding from sponsors, charities or government agencies responsible for multicultural issues. The same arguments may be used by cultural agencies such as film institutes and independent distributors in promoting world cinema titles to programmers and educators.

The problem here is that gains in multicultural learning are likely to predominate over any media learning that may be taking place. It is the multicultural learning that will be described and valued. It’s easily assumed that learners will just invisibly develop their own understanding of media techniques and choices alongside their experiences of cross-cultural communication. But where media learning is not made explicit and not reflected upon, there is little opportunity for the learner (with or without teacher guidance) to consider their level of media literacy and identify what they need to learn next.

Cultural identity and globalisation

There are potential overlaps here with the multicultural approach, in that an intelligent address to multiculturalism in media must open up questions about representation: about who is represented and who is not, and why. Given the shifts in the balance of media power afforded by the digital revolution, this could be the most interesting aspect of media literacy to develop: seeking ways of maintaining local, regional and national voices in the face of global media giants.

Once again, we need to ask who has an interest in helping to develop this aspect of media literacy. Cultural and linguistic communities that are threatened by cultural imperialism have an obvious interest and it is clear that this theme contributes to the European Commission’s interest in media literacy as a way of supporting European cultural production. The danger is that the specific interests of media literacy could be swamped by national or regional cultural agendas. A potentially important counter-initiative is the development of media literacy projects that link cultural and linguistic communities on a global scale.

Popular Culture

What are the “media” that media literacy deals with? Two opposed tendencies are locked in dispute here. On the one hand there are those who argue that learners’ own popular cultural choices and appropriations are as valid as anyone else’s and as worthy of study and reflection as high cultural forms. On the other, others contend that it must be the business of educators to take learners beyond their existing experiences and open their eyes to the possibilities of any medium, so they focus on non-mainstream forms, classic texts or morally uplifting tales. Each of these tendencies faces not only the antagonism of the other, but an uphill struggle with public opinion. Those who support popular culture are accused of pandering to the market and the lowering of taste; those who argue for cultural breadth are accused of elitism and preciousness. It does not seem to occur to many, either inside or outside these camps, that it is perfectly possible for media educators to address the full range of cultural production, from past and present avant-gardes to mainstream commercial media.
Building a credible case for media literacy

On the face of it, many of these problems and risks could be averted if there were agreed standards, progression models and assessment criteria for media literacy. There have been many attempts at these but little agreement. One key reason for this is that there has been very little research on education for media literacy that has produced credible evidence on progression and attainment, but it has to be acknowledged that any attempt to establish such frameworks for evaluation is always fraught with controversy and that we are bound to end up with a number of different models. Another is that media literacy initiatives are based on inconsistent models of what it is that learners know—or do not know—at the outset. So it may be assumed that children are unable to distinguish between fact and fiction on TV, or that teenagers are all enslaved consumers.

We must acknowledge that if media literacy is gain the status it deserves there have to be some recognisable criteria for claiming that individual learners have achieved a certain level of media literacy and can demonstrate not only their skills but also their knowledge and understanding.

The downside of this is that faulty models are bound to emerge: dreary catalogues of decontextualised skills; pointless hierarchies of knowledge; administratively unwieldy systems for assessment. These are to be expected, and much time will be expended on arguing about them. But to be at least having arguments about standards, progression and assessment would still be an improvement on the present situation.

The question here however must be: who has an interest in developing this aspect of media literacy? It became possible in the UK (at least for 16 and 18 year olds) because of its market-driven examination system: Media Studies and Film Studies examinations have proved to be a lucrative product for the companies that offer competing examination specifications. But most countries do not have such an arrangement and it can be extremely difficult to insert new qualifications into their systems at any level. There is then a temptation to prove that media literacy is worthwhile merely because it can benefit existing curricular subjects. Such benefits can of course be identified, but focusing only on these serves to reduce the status of media literacy to that of an ancillary support to higher-status subjects. A different scenario is to define media literacy in more vocational terms: as a key qualification for employment, but this entails a narrower set of skills, and a smaller number of beneficiaries, than many of us would want to contemplate.

One alternative would be for media literacy advocates to address the core subjects of the curriculum and join the debates that at least some other educators recognise: sooner or later, and with or without the assistance of media educators, 21st century education will have to acknowledge the changed communications environment and transform itself accordingly. A curriculum essentially devised in the 19th century can no longer serve our needs. This presents an interesting challenge to the media literacy movement.

Why use the term “media literacy” anyway?

The very term “media literacy” is inherited from an outworn and discredited 20th century tactic: that of adding the term “literacy” to topics and issues in an attempt to promote them as new but essential aspects of learning. Terms such as financial literacy, digital literacy, emotional literacy,
computer literacy and critical literacy may thus become temporarily fashionable, but they have little purchase on realpolitik at national level. To append the term “literacy” to a topic is almost to guarantee its marginality in educational or social planning; it invokes a supplicant role, pleading for recognition through special projects and short term initiatives.

By using the term “media literacy” we also accept an anglocentric world view, given that the word “literacy” does not translate easily from English into other languages. There is rarely any discussion in media literacy publications about the ambivalent and shifting usage of the word “literacy” in English, or about the different connotations provided by its available equivalents in other languages. This generates even more scope than usual for misunderstanding when we attempt to have an international dialogue about media literacy. It is probably better to stick to the term “media education” —as the French do anyway!

An alternative scenario for media educators would be for us to pluck up our courage and gather the resources we’ll need in order to engage with and intervene in national and international debate about what every person ought to know about, understand and be able to do. This could mean jettisoning the term “media literacy” and engaging directly with “literacy” or “mother tongue education”. Whatever words are used in each language to designate such essential learning in national curricula and other entitlement documents, we can be sure that such debate does go on in each culture and is often heavily politicised. By engaging with this debate, we would necessarily enter the political arena at a higher level than most of us do at present. We might also have to leave behind the parochial debates of the media literacy movement and address the bigger picture: what are the needs of 21st century learners?

The stakes are high. 21st century citizens everywhere face unprecedented changes in the ways they access knowledge, share ideas and participate politically. At the same time, global corporations face unprecedented opportunities to profit from the control of information, the inflection of cultural and political choices, and the circulation of ideas. Sooner or later, and for good or ill, these changes will affect the ways that education (as a life-long process, not just in schools) is accessed, and the extent to which it is managed by the state and/or by other agencies. Media educators have the knowledge and skills to be at the centre of these developments. But do we have the will? What would we lose and what would we gain by aligning ourselves with much wider movements for educational change?

Cary Bazalgette | United Kingdom
Identity and globalisation: the role of the imagination in the media

At the heart of the question of “children and the media” there lies the theme of the role of socialisation of the media with regard to children. A generation born through “immersion” in the new technologies cannot be understood or studied without a knowledge of the content offered by these technologies. It is not, therefore, a question of discussing the role of influence but rather of comprehending the contribution of the fantastic imagination in the moulding of minds. Media literacy plays a leading role here, since its goal of being able to provide young people with a programme of learning about the media through the media while offering them the possibility of forming an opinion, a paradigm of thinking, is increasingly essential in the cultural mission in which young people are immersed from birth.

Since the seventies, the same heroes have populated the fantasy worlds of children and young people the world over. Indeed, for the first time in the history of humanity, all the regions of the planet reached by television are inhabited by the same characters. And where there is a computer, young people from all parts of the world are able to participate in games that put them in contact with each other, independently of their physical presence, which allows them to identify with and measure themselves against the same protagonists.

The latest research carried out in Arab countries, as well as in Western and Oriental countries, proves that tele-fantasy exerts a standardising influence on the screens in front of which there sit children and adolescents from different cultures, ethnic origins, races, religions and ideologies. Nobody will ever know to what extent the behaviour of these heroes influences the attitudes of these watchers, because we cannot of course verify any direct link, scientifically proven, between the use of video games and behaviour patterns, but it is certain that the video screen spreads a way of perceiving the world.
The infinite world of myths, heroes of televised stories, video games, and cartoons, and that of the objects/gadgets that accompany them, consists of a flow of images, sounds and objects which have been propagated amongst the human race for more than thirty years and are increasing at an exponential rate. The theme tunes of cartoons and television series have become the expression/logo of a community, who sing and dance to them in discotheques, chant them in student processions, and launch into them at social gatherings and in the streets throughout the world.

The fact that young people find in cartoons traces of their “collective soul” by singing these songs in all four corners of the world is the clearest evidence of the direction of our research, based on the analysis of myths, values and behaviour models provided by the heroes of the television or of video games. We are talking about an eclectic fantasy made up of cartoons, made-for-TV films, sitcoms, games, and toys, and peopled by the same characters. This is why we hope to raise awareness of the symbolic world of today’s adolescents, like a tile in the mosaic of globalisation, and wish to see there an analysis of the colourful representation of reality, a study into the mythology of the adult world, a programme of research into the values and behaviour models offered to every inhabitant of the world.

In our opinion, this new fantasy may contribute to the definition of a new culture, in the same way as the ‘fluid’ religiosity and weakness of thought in which we are immersed. We wanted in effect to analyse a symbolic representation: the fantastic viewed through the myths, values and behaviour patterns of its players, in a “metaphysical” context that sums up and emphasises the reality from which it is derived.

Our research intends clearly to determine the bases for a new collective ideology, which is constantly changing and lasts no longer than a shared myth. In order to exist, each society has to project itself into the future; hitherto, all human communities have searched in their past for signs of the culture on which to build the personality of new generations. Myths and heroes have always been of great use in proposing, by their example, acceptable and compatible attitudes and social projects that may bond the members of the community and lead them towards a common goal. Since time immemorial, heroes have provided the evolutionary drive and essential spirit of society.

After the end of the great ideologies and the disappearance of certainties, the crisis—and the most obvious dimension of our postmodernism—lies precisely in the search for a new common direction. The symptoms of ongoing change can be seen everywhere: the affirmation of an increasingly distinct individualism, which, passing from narcissism to hedonism, is becoming increasingly cynical; the transverse nature of power, which is imposed by means of strategies based on ideologies that are more like pretexts than goals in themselves.

The laws for understanding a reality in a state of movement are not always clear, since this problem concerns many aspects: the vision of the world, possible interventions with a view to the solution of conflicts, comprehension of new lifestyles stamped with defiance towards politics, medicine and official religion. Dynamic new collective movements—ecological, social and spiritual—are constantly arising; we see the dawning of new “beliefs” that mix reinterpretations of religions, both Western and Oriental, ancient and contemporary. Since there is no longer any absolute truth, everyone can create his or her own universe on the basis of the right to eclecticism. A limitless syncretism and a voluntarist relativism are the most characteristic features of this cultural phenomenon that combines archaic traditions with the
new frontiers of the possible; this could become a reality thanks to the new technologies, but also through the return to favour of superstitions and tribal rites, involving new and ancient demons.

However, there remain two strategies for comprehending what is real: on the one hand, modern Man, linked to the culture of great ideologies and faith, who responds to the alteration of the orders of knowledge by a new distinction between reality and its double. His vision of the world is inseparable from an ideological construction that has to maintain the distance between reality and its representation, thus carefully retaining the possibility of an intervention, a final choice. On the other hand, there is post-modern Man, who, because he lives in and forms part of the society of communication, understands the progressive hegemony of representation over the objective fact. Man persuades himself that to express and reflect an opinion, especially by means of television or video games, is an exercise in domination and a sort of regenerative stimulation of the world. In this way, he goes beyond the subject-object dualism and ends by admitting the circularity of knowledge, while abandoning the rediscov- ery of an objective truth.

Our survey allowed us to verify empirically the globalisation of cultural models generated by the media through the ‘fantasy’ they provide. The most significant conclusion we can draw from this, from a sociological point of view, concerns the formation of an immense, unique and fantastic imaginary world — the most obvious indication of a human community without limits — inhabited by heroes and immersed in myths, expressions of different religions, ideologies and cults, all interconnected.

We may observe that the multimedia world, in which we are ‘immersed’ by contact with it from the moment of our birth, offers global contents in which the image is overtaking the word and removing its meaning; where time and space are those of pre-literary and tribal civilisations; where advertising — and its world of playthings — has reified the world of fantasy in order to put it on sale; where “morals” can be traced back to the country where the programmes originate: from Puritanism to cynicism (American in origin), from Shintoism (Japan) to amoral stories created in Europe but developed and produced in north-east Asia. It is in this way that myths last as long as the infatuation of those who, in order to create them, borrow them from the shared perception. One may definitively observe that these new heroes live in other worlds, the majority of them parallel worlds, that they never die, and that they endlessly repeat the same daily actions without rebelling, and that they thus confirm the established order.

Images that reproduce sensations have always been accompanied by elements of knowledge, because we will never be able to believe that the image of an animal with a human head is real, whereas we are capable of imagining it. We therefore do not know whether we are weak in the face of the imaginary that makes us fearful or if we are weak because we attribute a reality to it: everything depends on the social representations that we create.

Social representations are the interface between the individual and the social, between the rational and the impulsive, between the conscious and the unconscious; they contain at the same time both mental assemblages and the content of thinking. There exists no social representation without thinking, and no thinking without social representation. These are the bases of mental life, as much individual as collective. Social representations always have a
subject and an object: this inevitably involves representations of something for someone. The media, therefore, need to be looked at in a way that makes it possible to put their content in perspective: in this slot, media literacy finds its place.

Effectively, the life of individuals and societies is constantly subjected to imaginary impulses and images that materialise in the form of art and mental elaborations, both collective and individual. The imaginary crosses the history of civilisations; it forms an integral part of social groups, and in reality, although there does not yet exist a real tradition of sociology of the imaginary, a sociology without the imaginary could not exist.

Against the negative definitions of Western philosophy, according to which the imaginary is that which does not exist, the false and the irrational, the current anthropological thinking of M. Eliade, G. Bachelard and above all G. Durand, who opposes a definition, puts up a positive definition in which the imaginary is the product of mythical thinking, of concrete thinking which functions by means of analogies, is expressed in symbolic images, structured according to a dynamic, and in which the perception of space and time comes from material and institutional constructions, from mythologies and ideologies, from collective knowledge and behaviours. The importance of the imaginary in our globalised society is due to the omnipresence of the television, the Internet, the telephone, and resources liable to involve experiences that go beyond the objective limit between events and the “narrative” of these events: the information society poses new questions on economic, political, social and cultural issues precisely because events become social facts depending on the “echo” that they produce: we can no longer analyse the social without its duplicate!

Globalisation due to migratory movements, tourism, the internationalisation of environmental problems, and issues of markets and communications generates continuous transformations of the social fabric, leads to new ethical and political attitudes, and provokes new questions. Globalisation of the imaginary is a current phenomenon, seldom studied and of vast scope. Within current knowledge, and despite its immanence, the imaginary is still the subject of little study, while images and writing experience an historic rivalry that is far from over.

Photography, the cinema, television and the computer have never been the subject of so much research as they are today, in terms of both their content and their technologies, and if, as is affirmed by Jean Baudrillard, “everything works at the pace of seduction”, the image is the leading player in this process. The image, in advertising, in the cinema, on television and in print, suggests that we “feel through touch and sight, use ear and eye”, states Gilles Deleuze¹, although these promises made by the image obviously do not form part of its symbolic reality since the image is in effect only a fragment of the world experience and its symbolisation. However, all agree in saying that an image has more power than a set of sensory elements of experience and that it is hence more eloquent than speech and writing.

Thinking comes back, through the image, to less differentiated and immediate patterns, since, according to Freud, we will abandon in the image the search for a cognitive structure typical of a sophisticated mind, and on the other hand we find ourselves in a perceptive structure characteristic of the primordial relations of each individual. Semiologists also see in communication through images a way of thinking that is participative and emotive rather than rational.

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than symbolic. We are immersed in the image, and in this perspective virtual images form the technological realisation of an illusion that is present in relations with any figure. In today’s media-based flow of images and sounds, advertising messages and cartoons are a good example of this participation “by immersion”. In contrast to other psychic activities, the transformation of the image into meaning takes place in accordance with the tempo of the communication itself.

The imaginary influence of these figures may only be understood in reference to their capacity to ensure continuous evolution starting from a concept. It is to this power of the imagination to modify images that G. Bachelard above all pays particular attention, when he observes that “if an image does not determine an abundance of aberrant images, there is no imagination”. The capacity to transform images forms part of the very process of their constitution, which is furthermore closely linked to their mobility. They both derive from a single capacity for transformation of the initial work from its birth to its subsequent derivations.

A number of functions are therefore attributed to the imagination: of human physiology, corresponding to the need to dream; a regulatory function with regard to the unknown (death, for example) by means of myths and rites, a dream or science itself; one of social and individual creativity by representing the mechanisms of reason and offering an epistemological opening; and finally one of social communion, by promoting the appearance of ideal types, systems of representation and of the collective memory.

Thanks to its multiple functions, the imaginary makes it firstly possible to detach oneself from the immediate, the present and the everyday world without having to resort to mental abstractions. This creation of a world that is different from the one in which we live is a response to fundamental requirements and aims, which may be described according to both ontogenesis (formation of the individual) and phylogenesis (becoming part of the species). As affirmed by Edgar Morin, the process of humanisation is inseparable from an intelligent adaptation to what is real by means of language and technology, but it is also characterised by the need to escape from what is provided by the memory, dreams, inebriation, art, that which effectively transforms *homo demens* into a complement to *homo sapiens*.

Man invents, develops and legitimises his beliefs in the imaginary insofar as this relationship with the fantasy world complies with his needs, satisfaction, and the long- and short-term effects inherent in human nature. In parallel with the behaviour patterns that are useful for survival and work, the imaginary takes nourishment from gratuitous activities with no ulterior motive, such as play, amusement or the arts, to mention but a few of the most universal examples. Through play, present in all cultures, individuals satisfy a basic need for rest, spectacle, and activities that have no other purpose than personal enjoyment. As everyone knows, animals also play, and the child discovers in successive stages the relationship between its “self” and its environment through sensorial, dynamic and imitative forms of play.

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According to Jean Piaget⁵, the child begins its journey towards individualism by the repetition of acts that unconsciously become an imitation of other behaviour patterns. It is in this way that an object is taken for something else, for example a stick for a horse, and the mimicry thus acquired simulates the movements of the animal and brings it to life through the imagination. Playing is “doing as if”, it is repeating a non-real action using materials that associate it with the absent reality; it is an essential stage through which the child’s imagination takes shape, inhabited by characters and formed by ritual acts. In the age of products made by craftsmen, toys were realistic, imitating the contents of the game and serving as a kind of support to the imagination itself, whereas today this aspect is increasingly less true with regard to the new dimension of play, which tends to represent a television character or a related system of objects. The child places itself in its imaginary world, which it fills with toys, fictions and simulations, and which often functions as an interface between pure fantasy and the laws of the real world. The imaginary world of play thus plays a transactional role, since it reassures, and becomes a buffer between the internal world and the outside world⁶. Play extends into the world of adults, and enters into their culture as an amusement, since play, for the adult as well as for the child, meets the same need for rest, entertainment, and the search for pleasure, separate from the obligations of survival and work.

The omnipresence of the play aspect in the culture has been fully demonstrated⁷: this dimension is becoming more and more the monopoly of the screen (both television and cinema), the computer or the play-station, which constitute the instruments and principal forms of the day-to-day imaginary world, in the technologically developed world. By interrupting social, domestic or professional activities to sit down in front of the television, the spectator is participating, without moving, in the world of homo ludens described in Huizinga. The play element becomes frivolous, superfluous, gratuitous, a permanent opportunity to escape from day-to-day existence. Maintained within a limited space and time, it responds to a precise order that guarantees a kind of magical illusion, a source of pleasure. The profile of programmes, furthermore, may also be easily structured and compared to the typology of games as proposed by R. Caillois⁸.

We must firstly take into consideration those products that encourage identification and thus imitation: following on from theatrical, romantic and cinematographic texts, these are an irressible element of the individual and collective imagination. The broadcasting on television of real or fictitious stories does not just replace the ritual of the mythical narrative, or of the narrative itself, once the monopoly of an elite; it replaces, through the power of audiovisual animation, the reading of novels, which for the past three centuries has been the means of quenching the thirst for the imaginary.

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8. Mimesis (jeux de simulacre, d’imitation, de rôle), Agôô (jeux de compétition), Alea (jeux de hasard), Ilinx (recherche du vertige).
Competitive sport, based on struggle and competition that glorify social violence, finds itself in the imaginary world of sporting spectacles. Sporting competitions inflame the passions, raise the struggle to the level of paroxysm, on the basis of emotions and determination. We only have to look at the worldwide success of football matches and their viewing figures in all the world’s countries that have access to television. Above all, this responds to the need for a space for the legitimate expression of forbidden or standardised passions, for legal outbursts of violent tensions, for a need for the expression of symbolic violence, subject in daily life to economic and political power.

By promising “good fortune”, games of chance offer an inducement to satisfy the impulse to win; hoping for a win means savouring the pleasure of good fortune. It is for this reason that the media place great importance on broadcasting lottery results. The proliferation of televised games and the impressive wins shown are a symptom of a pronounced social trend towards the fetishisation of money, which, from a simple exchange value, is becoming a reified asset made of immaterial products. Whether they are linked to chance or competence in recognised experiences such as skill, cunning or knowledge, these games play a huge role in the field of audiovisual productions.

Finally, games combine dizzying excitement, excess and possession — as forms of regression and expansion of the self — which hitherto had not found much room in Western society, are growing in line with the pace of the media explosion. Paradoxically, recent audiovisual amusements have made it possible, through music, concerts and video games, to develop hitherto unknown experiences of trancelike pleasures. The frenzy for music, increasingly widespread and largely magnified by audiovisual means, has boosted the process of the idolisation of singers; as for the frequency of hypnotic states produced by sounds and images, it shows very clearly that a narcotic imaginary world is appearing, based on the consumption of violent emotions and a considerable intensification of physical activity.

Marina D’Amato
It is widely recognized that media literacy is a fundamental dimension of citizenship. Freedom of expression and the fostering of critical autonomy are concepts that are central to the work of practitioners in media literacy education. News, current events and entertainment media are resources that can promote the development of critical thinking and communication skills about contemporary social, cultural, political and economic issues (see O’Neill, 2008, for review).

Now that media literacy has become a policy matter in Europe as a result of the emerging convergence in the communications industry, these issues are gaining visibility. However, significant gaps exist in how we understand the relationship between media literacy education and human rights. The International Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes “Protection, Provision and Participation,” concepts which parallel the most common models of media literacy (Frau-Meigs, 2008). There is a growing sense globally that media literacy education may enable the realization of the full democratic potential of the information society (Livingstone, 2004). But since the media and technology industries are so rapidly changing and there are a wide range of competencies, knowledge, attitudes and skills are part and parcel of becoming media literate, educators are challenged to create meaningful learning environments to support this complex process.

However, there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution here. Media literacy education must make sense within a particular local context and use culturally-relevant pedagogy. Children from poor and working class communities may have one set of particular needs regarding media literacy education while children from more economically privileged communities have a different set of needs (Morduchowitz, ND). While popular culture is enjoyed by children from all socioeconomic groups, “for working-class children these texts and artifacts may be the primary source of out-of-school literacy practices” (Marsh, 2007, p. 530).

When we look closely at the practice of media literacy education in various contexts, the need to move beyond simple platitudes about the transformative potential of media literacy education become evident. It is towards this stage of action onto which the international media literacy education community must begin to move.

In this paper, I first contextualize the relationship between media literacy education and education for citizenship. Then I offer a particular example of a complex case of how media literacy education connects to citizenship, based on my own experience in working with a team of educators to develop a media literacy program for poor and working-class African-American children (ages 5 to 12) in a summer school program in Philadelphia. The case illustrates some of the opportunity for innovation as well as the challenges and apparent contradictions that are evident in the practice of media literacy education.

**Media Literacy as Citizenship Education**

Scholars have developed various overlapping ideological positions about why schools need to include mass media and popular cultural texts. They argue that popular culture provides a means of orienting children to traditional literacy practices; it bridges the gap between the classroom and the culture for children whose ‘cultural capital’ is not normally recognized in educational settings; the need for critical analysis of popular culture is seen as inherently valuable; and popular culture is seen as having the power to recontextualize school knowledge in the ‘third space’ where authority is challenged and hybrid identities are created (see review in Marsh, 2007).

But in many countries, the debate about how to give media literacy a meaningful place in elementary and secondary schools is still a robust and open issue, given the conservative nature of schooling and the institutional structures that control it. While England offers advanced courses to adolescents in Media Studies, media literacy education is not particularly visible in the lower grades, particularly at the primary level (Bazalgette, 2007). In the United States, although media literacy education has become more visible in English language arts instruction (Hobbs, 2007), it has not gained much headway in K-12 social studies, where courses in history, government and civics are taught to children and young people. For example, the most recent revision of curriculum standards for the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2008) does not include media literacy, focusing instead on broad themes for content like time, continuity, and change; the relationship among people, places, and environments; and civic ideals.

In history and civic education, there is still very little focus on promoting skills of accessing, analyzing, or evaluating messages. The social studies curriculum still relies, predominantly on a familiar, if dated, instructional model. Media texts are conceptualized primarily as tools for transmission: they are valued only for the content they contain. In establishing the core
ideas at the heart of media literacy education, Masterman (1985) has noted that both teachers and students should be encouraged to treat school books and images not as transparent carriers of knowledge, but as “culturally loaded texts which need to be actively deconstructed and critically read” (p. 250). For media literacy education to become part of school culture, concepts like author, audience, purpose, point of view, subtext, omission and interpretation must be part of the discourse of all teachers, including those teaching history and civics. Students should gain practice in using communicative power, as individuals and in collaboration with others, to make changes in their school and community.

Because of the rise of digital media, global citizenship in the 21st century must now address new topics and issues within the classroom curriculum. Some of these issues include:

- the social responsibility of the communicator in the use of tools such as cell phones, texting, instant messaging, chat rooms, etc.;
- the rise of the Internet and its impact on the nature of knowledge;
- piracy, copyright, fair use, and the knowledge economy;
- the consequences of transnational media ownership;
- how media messages shape understanding of culture, nationality, race and gender;
- the concepts of fame and celebrity, their social and political function and their evolution over time;
- the relationship between governments, media institutions and the public;
- propaganda, advertising and public relations as tools for shaping public opinion.

However, only recently has scholarship begun to examine the paradoxes and complications that occur in the context of this work. When it comes to exploring news and current events in a global context, students often respond to learning about the media with “cynicism (if they begin to think it is all lies anyway, so who cares?), guilt (if they begin to feel it is their fault for not being good consumers of the media), or anger (if they feel their political beliefs are being criticized in the classroom)” (Schmitz and Hitchliffe [2006, p. 167]. Similarly, Mihailidis (2009) found that students enrolled in a college-level media literacy course expressed their belief that media literacy education enabled them to feel more informed about current events, but students showed high levels of negativity about media’s role in society.

Therefore, educators face a special set of opportunities and challenges when using news and current events to promote critical analysis, communication skills, and civic engagement and advocacy. Not all teachers are well-prepared for this. When a news or current events topic inspires genuine controversy, it may be difficult to predict how students, parents, school officials and community leaders will respond. When breaking news stimulates classroom dialogue, it may be difficult to predict in advance what the consequences of the conversation will be. It may be difficult to predict with any precision the learning outcomes that will result. When teaching with the unfolding narratives of current events, the “content” of the curriculum is inherently unstable and teachers cannot always anticipate the direction that the lesson will take. A particular level of sophistication and experience on the part of the teacher is required for media literacy education to reach its goals under these circumstances.

This is particularly true when a news story involves complex, unresolved social issues. We have seen these discussions erupt in classrooms around issues such as the candlelight
demonstrations that occurred in South Korea last summer over changes to the ban on American beef imports. Public anger in South Korea resulted from the perception that the government’s readiness to cave into Washington was ignoring genuine health concerns. More than 35,000 people gathered to protest the government policy.

Teachers who explore controversial news and current events topic in the classroom can find themselves accused of advocating a particular ideological agenda. When breaking news and current events are included as classroom texts, the “lessons learned” will never be ones that teachers can fully control. Given the unpredictable nature of the way news stories unfold, some teachers may pause before exploring contemporary current events as a tool to promote critical analysis and communication skills.

A Teachable Moment: Children as Victims of Racism

This summer, in my home city of Philadelphia, a local news story captured the attention of city residents when charges of racism were leveled at the president of the Valley Swim Club after this club canceled the swimming privileges of a nearby day care center whose children are predominantly African-American. During the summer of 2009, this controversial story was the topic of much heated conversation across the city and even across the United States, as the event was reported on CNN, the New York Times, and in many other news outlets.

The news story provided a “teachable moment” for some of the urban elementary school children ages 5 to 12 who were enrolled in Powerful Voices For Kids (PVK), a media literacy and technology integration program developed by the Media Education Lab at Temple University in partnership with the Russell Byers Charter School in Philadelphia. The program consists of four components: (1) a summer camp for children; (2) a professional development program for teachers; (3) a mentoring program for teachers; and (4) a research program using qualitative observation and quantitative measures of some skills associated with media literacy learning.

Because the children in our classrooms were also largely poor and African-American, the news story about children denied access to a swimming pool because of their race was noteworthy. In the context of our summer camp program, some teachers in the program used press coverage of the event to explore the issue of how racism is depicted in the news media, to encourage children to consider the role of conflict in the structure of news and current events, to reflect on the many choices made by the stakeholders, to promote creative multimedia composition skills involving digital media, and to examine the story as a lens on American culture and values.

John Landis, a teacher, decided to examine the issue with his rising Grade 5 (age 10) students. To begin, he asked if students were familiar with the news story. Students shared what they remembered seeing on television news. Then the teacher offered students an article he had selected, one that was recently published online. Students read each sentence of the news story aloud, asking questions like: What information does this sentence add to our understanding of the event? Whose point of view is this? What does this quote mean? How do you interpret it? How might someone else interpret it? Why did the reporter select this quote? Students made a chart on the blackboard to document what they learned.

In building an understanding of the discourse structures of news, this activity enabled children to strengthen their understanding the function of sources and to interrogate the use of direct quotations in news reporting. While children had a general understanding of the
function of quotation marks, this particular news story used many complex constructions, including internal quotations such as the use of quotes from children at the pool remembering what they had overheard while there, such as: “I heard this lady, she was like, ‘Uh, what are all these black kids doing here?’ She’s like, ‘I’m scared they might do something to my child,’” said camper Dymire Baylor (NBC Philadelphia, 2009). Students got to consider the function of quotation marks as indicators of credibility, debating whether (or not) the quotes could be considered as trustworthy and reliable.

One of the challenges the teacher faced was the question about “how critical” to be in responding to the fact patterns evident in this news event. In deciding how to address this issue, the teacher reflected on the children’s age and how the story intersected with their own personal identity, acknowledging, “My impulse about wanting them to be critical about the news story was sometimes at odds with my interest in having them be passionate about an issue.”

Was there a way to develop students’ ability to connect with the lived experience of the children depicted in the news story, to promote empathy in response the many stakeholders involved in this story? Instead of seeing it as merely a topic of conversation or an in-class reading comprehension activity, it was determined that a digital media production activity—one involving interactive games—could best help students strengthen creative problem-solving skills while promoting civic engagement.

**The Teachable Moment Goes Digital and Interactive**

Before developing the media production activity, the teacher wanted students to get some exposure to “serious games,” a term used to describe when computer and video games are used as persuasion technology. Serious games can be of any genre (Bogost, 2007) and have been used as an engagement tool to promote media literacy concepts with pre-adolescent children (Hobbs & Rowe, 2008).

Children began this part of the curriculum by exploring the game, “Ayiti: The Cost of Life” (www.thecostoflife.org), which uses the location of Haiti to educate players about the obstacles to education faced by children in developing countries. Conceptualized by youth in a Global Kids program and developed by gaming professionals, the project was supported by a Microsoft grant. In the game, each player assumes the roles of family members living in rural Haiti. Players must choose among and balance various goals, such as achieving education, making money, staying healthy, and maintaining happiness while encountering unexpected events like disease and hurricanes.

Throughout the entire process, the teacher did not know how the news story would evolve. This could have been used as a rationale for not tackling the subject with young children. But when it comes to breaking news and current events, no one is ever fully aware of the outcome of particular choices beforehand. (In this news story, the campers involved in the Valley Pool incident could certainly not have anticipated that the outcome of their summer day care experience would be an all-expenses-paid trip to Disney World.)

Watching the news unfold, the teacher wanted students to see that every complex news event or social issue entails a set of choices or decisions, made by each of the stakeholders. So, with his Grade 5 students, the teacher introduced these questions: How do you take an issue like the Valley Pool incident and turn it into a videogame? What parts of this story can be turned into a game? What are some of the choices involved?
Using the programming software Scratch (scratch.mit.edu), students developed many approaches to solve the design challenge at the heart of this assignment. Each student was responsible for creating one of the “levels” of the game. Some of their solutions were trivial: one student created a simple interactive where campers get in the bus and the user drives the bus to the pool. Another student created an interactive where the user gets the campers dressed into their swimsuits. Other students developed solutions that were more complex and relevant to the classroom discussion: one child created a “choose your own adventure game” where users select various possible conversations between the day care children and the white people at the pool. Another child created an interactive version of the press event, where the pool director faces the microphones of the press and offers many reasons for excluding the children from the pool — some plausible and others simply excuses.

In reflecting on children’s creative approaches in developing the interactives, the teacher noted, “I didn’t reject any ideas but played up the ones that got closer to the more implicit ideas at the heart of the news story. I hoped students would reflect the story’s central paradoxes, and not just retell trivial elements of the narrative as a game. I wanted students to use the power of the interactive game to show how things might have occurred or could have been different if people made different choices. Plus, I wanted students to reflect on their own work as game designers. My most common question to them was: What choices are you giving the user?”

This approach to exploring a controversial news event is far more powerful than those now used in more traditional educational contexts, where children are positioned as readers and viewers of news and encouraged to make only simple discriminations between “fact” and “opinion.” In this case, the use of digital interactive media as means of creative expression is highly responsive to the actual feelings of participation that children now experience in their relationships with mass media, digital technologies and popular culture.

**Conclusion**

As European educators take advantage of the policy statements that are now promoting media literacy education as a basic dimension of citizenship, it is important to take into account what we know (and don’t know) about how specific kinds of instructional practices affect learners. When it comes to news and current events, the teachable moment, while unpredictable, can strengthen analysis skills and provide opportunities for creative expression. As shown in this paper, even young children can be encouraged to consider how news is constructed, and not in ways that promote cynicism and not from the position of a spectator. For young children, exploration of news and current events may reinforce existing beliefs rather than challenge and deepen reflective thinking. Digital media production tools do offer a means for students to engage with news and current events from the position of a participant. As news and current events become the core “texts” of media literacy education, it will be important to reflect on the complex values and identity issues that result.

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Nowadays, children spend more time watching television than they spend at school. Adding this to the time they devote to films, magazines, computer games, the internet and popular music, it becomes obvious that the media constitute by far their most significant leisure-time pursuit. Many argue that the media have by now substituted the place of family and school as the major socialising influence in contemporary society\(^1\). So is there any time left for creative activities?

Public debate on this issue tends to be rather emotional but needs to be based on serious, in-depth research. Equally, it is vital that educators are able to use media in constructive and creative ways. We need to move beyond a merely defensive and reactive approach and find new ways of empowering young people, both as critical consumers of media and as producers in their own right.

Teachers, social workers and other professional educators working with young people know that it is very difficult to achieve consciousness merely by analysing media. Experience and a lot of research shows that children and young people are learning far more easily by creating media-related products themselves. Still, the process of obtaining consciousness is a long way and depends on various factors underlying this learning process.

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1. www.cscym.zeolab.info/people/64-staff-member/74-professordavidbuckingham
All definitions of media literacy, media competence and media education list several objectives dealing with skills young people should obtain regarding their use of the media. Within a wide range of capabilities, a major emphasis is set on the creation of media-related products or the creative use of media. Sometimes it is only mentioned vaguely, yet other times it is especially underlined.

One example promoting the idea of productive and creative use is the definition of Media Literacy in the United States: “Media Literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms — from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.”

Similarly, the European Charter of Media Literacy denotes the following capabilities: “Media literate people should be able to
• Use media technologies effectively to access, store, retrieve and share content to meet their individual and community needs and interests;
• Gain access to, and make informed choices about, a wide range of media forms and content from different cultural and institutional sources;
• Understand how and why media content is produced;
• Analyse critically the techniques, languages and conventions used by the media, and the messages they convey;
• Use media creatively to express and communicate ideas, information and opinions;
• Identify, and avoid or challenge, media content and services that may be unsolicited, offensive or harmful;
• Make effective use of media in the exercise of their democratic rights and civic responsibilities.”

As these objectives show, creativity is mainly used to express and communicate ideas, information and opinions. Further on, we will see whether there are more ways to apply creativity. Yet, as creativity is a rather vague concept, to evaluate contexts in which it may be applied, definitions of that very concept are necessary.

According to Wikipedia, “Creativity is a mental and social process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts, or new associations of the creative mind between existing ideas or concepts. Creativity is driven by the process of either conscious or unconscious insight. An alternative conception simply defines creativity as the act of making something new. From a scientific point of view, the products of creative thought (sometimes referred to as divergent thought) are usually considered to have both originality and appropriateness. Another adequate definition of creativity explains it as an “assumptions-breaking process” as creative ideas are often generated when one discards preconceived assumptions and attempts a new approach or method that might seem to others unthinkable.”
Yet, when exploring ways to integrate creativity in the process of acquiring media literacy, we have to think and use the term in an educational context. Rousseau, whose *Emile* (1762) suggests how play is an essential process in the development of children as rational, ethical and social beings, may be perceived as the beginning of modern pedagogies involving play and creativity. Further influential accounts of the relation between play, learning and creativity can be found in developmental psychology and philosophy, especially in the work of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner. Still, the question whether play is necessarily creative (or, indeed, whether creativity is necessarily playful) remains a persistent one.

The creative potential of new technologies, however, is subject of an ongoing debate. Generally, there are two opposing perspectives: Some critics take this situation as the embodiment of risks for children and as a possible threat to creativity, while others regard it as challenge. Is the use of technology itself inherently creative? And how may creative elements and potentials be sustained (and even promoted?) by using new technologies?

Avril Loveless (2002) argues that digital technologies open up new and authentic ways of being creative “which have not been as accessible or immediate without new technologies” (*ibid.*, 2), suggesting that technology itself engenders new avenues for creativity if and where the potential for these is recognised. This is, as she explains, due to a complex set of features of ICT: improvisation, interactivity, capacity, range, speed and automatic functions. She correctly observes, however, that simply bringing together a ‘cultural experience’ and a technological means of accessing does not provoke creativity by itself. What does this mean in terms of the uses of technology —creative or otherwise— in education?

New technologies create new possibilities for children to become creative producers of media, rather than simply remaining “consumers”. Therefore, media production is a key element of media education, both in schools and in more informal settings. The JFF-Institute for media education is interested in ways children learn to make their own media products, and kinds of “literacies” that they develop by doing so. Furthermore, we are keen to employ similar “creative” methods in research, as a way of enabling children to represent their own concerns and identities. Several research and evaluation projects were and are conducted in this area over the past sixty years and several researchers work on different aspects of children’s media production.

The major emphasis at the JFF —Institute for media education is on

- Creativity in using media.
- Creativity in designing media.
- Creative Learning with regard to lessons about a special topic.

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Creativity in using media
Playing with media

Obviously, a computer relies on the input it receives and cannot give more than it gets. But digital equipment includes more than one brain can take. Hence, new media change ways of thinking. For example: When you are writing you have to think about what is the main theme first, secondly the structure of a text has to be subdivided into several aspects and finally the text is divided into arguments. This ranking of ideas often does not reflect the meaning of the subject. Hypertext, the new structure of writing for the internet enables us to write or read the way we are thinking. We begin with a subject and then we follow this idea until it reaches the realisation of the idea in a linear way. Due to the possibility of hyperlinks we can chose between several levels of content and there is no need to read the complete text. Even though each equipment faces limitations for itself, in general the mere possibility of decision is enlarged to infinite dimensions. Digital functions also change our ways of communication. Surely we can write letters, of course we can make calls to someone else, but we can also spread our ideas to people yet unknown. Today, there are various possibilities to communicate personal ideas: SMS, Online Communities, YouTube, Twitter… It is your decision whether you exchange secrets with close friends only or whether you want to reach out to the world.

Children and young people have to acquire cultural heritage like writing, reading, counting, but they always feel the urge to make new experiments. A computer is bound to its commands and cannot create anything new. Still, many people prefer to use ready-made standards, such as Clip Art or PowerPoint, unaware that there are far more functions to create their own picture. And children often prefer the perfect signs or symbols offered by the software. They are proud of the products, which look perfect and clean. But even simple software includes elements such as “Paint”, with which they could prettify their standardized products and add an individual touch.

Lately, many functions were developed which combine new media with “old” cultural issues. You can scan pictures painted by hand and mix it with digital photos or online applications. In this way you can disband borders between two different kinds of media. Additionally, media are increasingly used as tools, yet they are not only tools but also toys. There are toys which are made for children and young people. Contrary to public opinion, not all of these games are aesthetically, socially and morally bad. Playing computer-games increases other skills and qualities like quickness, strategic thinking and concentration. However, concerning creativity, they are quite uninteresting.

Example: Production of mobile clips
Instead of offending classmates with humiliating and aggressive mobile films, so called “happy slapping” it is possible too to show what else you can do with your mobile. One method is to create new sounds, another to shoot interesting photos and films. The small screen invites to produce very abstract pictures. They can tell for example a little story only by showing hands or feet.
Creativity in designing media
Creating media

For every new piece of technological equipment, new ways of design and art have followed. In most EU countries there are museums presenting digital art, for example the ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, La Laboral in Gijon, Spain and the Ars Electronica Center in Linz, Austria. In addition, you can find many galleries of fine arts online. Can everybody be an artist nowadays?

Computers did not only provide new methods of showing art, but they also created a trend of new aesthetic thinking. Back in 1968, the one major thing that mattered was content. Now content has no priority. You may regret it or not: nowadays it is the aesthetic form that counts more than the content. “Form follows function” (Louis Sullivan, 1856) was the key-word in the last decade of the 20th century. Still, this statement was not turned on its head. But the belief that each content needs an adequate form is standard amongst young people today. And new media make it possible that the dream of Joseph Beuys “Everybody is an artist” (Joseph Beuys 1985) could become true.

Hence, many possibilities are used to create individual surroundings: young people format their sheets of paper for school, they print flyers for their parties, they show presentations illustrated by pictures, they compose new sounds for their mobiles, they edit photos and they create books for their drawing lesson, for example about “architecture of the 19th century”.

There are no limits regarding theme and use of new software, which can often be found free of charge. Still, there is one major problem: at school the computers often are not able to handle the software. Furthermore, there is an additional problem at school: teachers cannot support pupils in their urge to create new kinds and variations of pictures and forms as they lack sufficient skills for using necessary soft- and hardware. Unfortunately, the consequence is a dialectic process which quite often prevents young people from pursuing their interest in form and content.

Example: Production of a photo story
Nothing is easier than to create a photo story, such like the photo stories in juvenile magazines. You only have to invent a story, take pictures and to write the text into speech bubbles.
Creative learning with regard to a topic
Learning with media

As young people often miss a motivation to learn and acquire new knowledge, adopting media in learning environments may promote motivation and increase their interest in various topics. For example, producing a personal film or carrying out a professional interview does not only teach them methodological skills but also encourages them to deal with a specific topic intensely.

Besides, in institutional contexts, pupils are obliged to present the outcome of their learning process, mainly to get it graded. In the past, teachers tested pupils to display their skills and weaknesses. These tests were generally based on reproductive skills, such as memorized facts and figures. However, today education aims to promote productive thinking and problem-solving skills. According to this new focus on competences rather than on knowledge, new methods of marking have to be designed, such as project-oriented work or presentations. Accordingly, creative and productive applications of new media may promote sufficient learning outcomes and improve the learners’ motivation.

Moreover, we have to think about the objectives of school: Should we repeat cultural knowledge again and again? Or is it better to cooperate with young people and help to resolve questions in a way they understand? While they are learning, for example, a language by using the web, every student can reflect on the value of putting everything in the internet, all mistakes, all comments of the teacher. By way of using media as a method, the relation between teacher and pupil changes: there are duties which have to be fulfilled, problems which have to be solved. The balance of power changes from a hierarchical relationship into a more cooperative one. Consequently, there is less pressure on learners, yet they need to organise their learning process autonomously. However, learning with new media may reduce personal contact and interaction between teacher and pupil or between fellow pupils. As personal interaction such as critical feedback and appreciation is known to have an impact on learning outcome and personal development, the amount of new media in learning environments has to be evaluated critically.

Example: Production of an animation film to learn the story of the European Union
In Germany teacher students have the possibility to choose European studies as a subject. The motivation to produce an animation film with students about the origin of the European Union was:

• to learn how to make a film;
• to use a language with signs and symbols that everybody can understand;
• to learn quickly the most important years when the EU was founded.

The students arranged a scene with play dough figures, stars and sheets of paper where they marked the years. Then they took photos (12 per second) and loaded them up in “MovieMaker”. Finally they added the title and the names of the authors and presented the movie to their classmates.

**Conclusion**

Media literacy is more than the creative production of a film, a comic book, a new homepage or another mobile sound. Media literacy is about setting children and young people free, making them conscious, critical and independent of what the media industry brings into their lives. But first they have to learn how to use different kinds of media.

Philosophers and writers like Berthold Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Hans-Magnus Enzensberger always emphasized that people should produce their news themselves whenever a social system tries to deny access to information. Indeed, we knew well before the rebellion in Iran (Persia) how important it is who owns the institutions in charge of providing information. Media literacy and media competence do not only involve knowing how to use gadgets and devices but also being aware of different ways to apply this knowledge and what effects these ways have on others. Hence, a simple sender may be used to publish child pornography, but it also can be used as a banner for freedom. Creative and productive use of the media raises awareness for imaginative yet sensible adaptations. Consequently, creativity needs to be integrated into concepts of media literacy and into projects aiming to promote similar competences.

Additionally, young people, especially teenage boys and girls between 12 and 18 years have to express themselves for they have to know who they are. They play with roles and role-models, they show themselves in videos and publish their picture in communities or on YouTube. As this is a way to represent themselves and their growing identity in front of their peers and people yet unknown, they want a reaction on their behaviour, firstly by other youngsters, secondly by adults. Creativity in expressing themselves is a method to experiment with oneself and various identities, but young people make it a point to test limits, perhaps not limits concerning the look, but limits related to social life. Media literacy in this sense should provoke new ways of communication. But it should be clear that everybody has the social responsibility of the effects.

Creativity in media as a learning method can motivate, but only when the teacher is a real expert in media. It only works because it is something new. Therefore it must be seen as a method of learning. Some time later the same thing does not work any more.

Yet, playing with media, creating media products and using media as learning motivation is useful for all young people of all ages, from every environment and exposed to all kinds of previous experiences.

**Dr. Ida Poettinger** | Institute for Media Research and Media Education
Challenges
The challenges of media literacy

Obstacles to the integration of media literacy

To ensure the clarity of my comments, I would firstly like to dwell on the recurring problems encountered by media literacy during its integration into school systems, as I explained at the UNESCO International Conference in Paris in June 2007.

Amongst the restraints on the development of media literacy, the foremost is the all-too-frequent marginal position that it occupies in the initial training of teaching staff. This situation ensures that it has difficulty establishing itself side-by-side with other school subjects, which prevents it from reaching all the teaching staff. Once again, all too often—at least in America—media literacy is confined to the field of continuous training.

Another major obstacle, which results in a common conceptual shift and makes us deviate from our framework of action and our educational mission, is that of this drift towards education "by" the media (the latter being perceived as educational tools), rather than the pursuit of an actual education "about" the media, with the latter being seen as subjects to be studied. This drift is a classic case, and I will not dwell any longer on this reality, of which we are all aware. However, may I explain that I dispute the validity of one of the pieces of wording in the final declaration of the Paris Conference, which affirms that it is no longer of any use to make the distinction between education "by" and "about" the media, and that we should on the contrary adopt a more inclusive definition. I, however, believe that we should on the other hand speak out unambiguously in favour of maintaining this fundamental distinction; otherwise, we risk losing our way in both theoretical and methodological terms. I am very much in favour of education "by" the media, but in this case it is no longer education "about" the media. To use a piece of imagery, when we talk about ice hockey—excuse the Canadian reference—we’re
speaking of a game involving players using hockey sticks who practice this sport on a rink made of ice. If you play hockey on grass, mounted on horses and using sticks that resemble golf clubs, we’re not talking about ice hockey any more, but polo. It’s no longer the same sport; it’s not the same animals running around… In searching too hard for an inclusive definition, media literacy runs the risk of losing sight of its own unique character, which would lead to great confusion amongst teachers - and that is the last thing we want.

**The temptation of the “ready-to-teach” approach**

Finally, we may note the persistence of a major obstacle to the development of media literacy, what may be described as a trend, amongst teachers, to yield to the temptation of the “ready-to-teach” approach, borrowing this analogy from the world of fashion, where it is used to describe uniform standardised items produced in the clothing industry, “prêt-a-porter” being only a pale imitation of original and unique creations from the world of haute couture.

Many years of teaching experience lead me to observe that a good number of teachers are looking for educational formulae, in other words educational activities and projects that are already formatted, where all the stages of the course have been designed in advance, and which they only have to reproduce in class with a minimum of personal intervention. Thus we are confronted with the difficulty of getting teachers to actually take the media literacy approach on board. There are far too few teachers who themselves take the path of reflection and analysis, on the basis of theoretical concepts presented to them in education workshops, and who put into practice, in class and in a sustainable way, original pedagogic interventions.

A very strong trend is thus manifesting itself, that seeks to reduce training programmes to exchanges of ideas on the theme of the practical dimensions linked to the procedural considerations regarding the way in which to integrate the educational strategies of “ready-to-teach”, that would be transposable into any school context.

We now realise that what should constitute a valuable teaching aid —that is to say the existence of a wide range of educational resources available for the purpose of illustrating different ways of integrating media literacy into the classroom— constitutes, at the same time, a formidable trap of which we should be wary. This is because a good number of teachers tend to wish to reproduce these models without really seeking to take them on board. In this way, we are always surprised to observe how the theoretical elements, which should favour the approach of integrating innovative educational practices, are rapidly obscured in favour of exchanges of ideas on how do we do it? rather than what do we do? and above all why do we do it?

Now, of course, nothing is further from what we are aiming at than the superficial adoption of such an approach to media literacy. It is obviously not for the purpose of being imitated, and even less of being copied, that elements of theoretical thinking are submitted to teachers, during their training, that nurture their educational expertise in media literacy. What we are aiming at is that this theoretical framework and the educational experiences that it generates should, in their turn, be the subject of critical analysis and evaluation on the part of teachers, since this approach alone can lead them to an independent conception of original and sustainable pedagogic interventions, adapted to suit the particular context of their class and thus promote the development of critical thinking amongst their pupils with regard to the media.
This description of the difficulties teachers have in appropriating the approach to media literacy does not aim to put the blame on them or hold them responsible for this deadlock. Far be it from me to seek to make teachers into convenient scapegoats, with the aim of concealing our share of the responsibility. On the contrary, we must examine this responsibility, otherwise we risk seeing ourselves condemned to finally getting stuck, or only making modest progress with regard to our ambitious expectations. Better determination of the causes of this situation and its consequences may even assist us in finding other ways out of this impasse. Attempting to see more clearly, while seeking to picture everything from another perspective, seems to me more productive.

We cannot escape it. We must resolutely attack this problem, which in my eyes constitutes the principal challenge, or at least one of the most important, that we must face today.

Too onerous a task?

Several reasons come spontaneously to mind to explain the difficulty experienced by teachers in bringing about sustainable modifications to their teaching practices and integrating an authentic approach to media literacy. The first we might be tempted to mention is naturally their workload. Since this is already so demanding, this might explain why teachers do not have the necessary time to carry out an in-depth rethink of their educational approaches and explore new ones.

Although this reason is often cited by teachers themselves, this argument does not hold water. Their workload is often heavy, particularly in those classes with a large number of pupils in difficulty. However, the majority of teachers with whom I have worked during all these years accept the invitation extended to them to explore new educational approaches if they see in them a way of making their teaching more dynamic and effective. What is more, it is proving obvious, for those who really put themselves into it, that properly integrated media literacy does not increase the burden of teaching duties; on the contrary, it has a facilitating effect.

Persistent insecurity

Rather than searching elsewhere for the root causes of our difficulties in convincing teachers to modify their pedagogic interventions by using the media in class in a critical way, we must establish that these difficulties are linked to our way of envisaging training in media literacy. There is also a deep-seated link with the way in which teachers imagine media literacy.

To put things more simply, I believe that we, the much talked-about specialists in media literacy, have largely underestimated the innovative character that our field of study and research assumes in the eyes of education professionals.

During the past three years, I have worked to develop and coordinate, along with the whole teaching staff, a training project on media literacy in an underprivileged school on the Island of Montreal, the Garneau Primary School. My work with these motivated teachers leads me to observe that the principal obstacle to the integration of media literacy comes mainly from the fact that teachers consider media literacy to be an excessively demanding field.

Media literacy appears to them to be a complex world, difficult to master, based on knowledge that calls upon equally complex disciplines: sociology, political sciences, economics, philosophy, rhetoric, content analysis, semiology, history, cultural criticism, aes-
thetic criticism, etc. Now, teachers do not feel familiar with these disciplines, and what’s more, in many cases, they have absolutely no interest in them — for what interests them, impassions and motivates them, is the children themselves — and furthermore, it’s for this reason that they have chosen this profession; to be in contact with the children and to play a useful role in their pupils’ learning processes.

How many times has it been necessary to refuse this role of arbitrator that they spontaneously allot to us when divergent points of view and opinions are expressed regarding the media and their influence? They then turn to us, so that we may resolve the issue, to establish what is true, just and pertinent to say to their pupils, even though we clearly established, from the outset, that we would refuse to play this totally anti-pedagogic role.

Putting teachers in contact with theoretical thinking on media literacy — that we nevertheless try hard to present in the most accessible way possible — often seems to lead to a dose of insecurity.

This question of representation that teachers create regarding media literacy is decisive, and should not be underestimated. For although it is one thing for us to learn about research into the media and communication technologies and their user groups, it is actually representations that play the decisive role in the use of the media and these technologies. It is our representations that to a large extent determine the use that we make of the media. This usage in turn generates representations, which then alter existing uses. All this takes place within a socio-cultural context that shapes our way of generating representations and uses, inside a systemic process that is in a state of excessive flux and is often unpredictable.

Thus, rather than contributing to breathing a new dynamism into teaching, media literacy is the source of a malaise in many teachers. It gives rise to many interesting questions and fascinating reappraisals. In their eyes, however, it offers few certitudes on which to rely once they find that their pupils often know much more than them in terms of the uses of certain communication technologies.

A change of scale

The Unesco international conference held in Paris asked us, two years ago, what actions should be undertaken in order to mobilise all the players concerned so that media literacy might develop on a large scale at international level.

We should rather envisage that media literacy should develop on another scale, if it wishes to succeed in establishing itself in a sustainable way in the educational practices of a large number of teachers.

If I wished to sum up in a slogan the observation that all these years of teaching have led me to make, and in particular the last three years spent with the staff at the Garneau School, I would say that from now on we should move from media literacy for the teachers to media literacy for the pupils.

It goes without saying that media literacy is intended for the young - they are the real user group at which we are aiming. In the final analysis, we train the teachers so that they may teach the young. However, we must recognise that we are struggling to catch up with the pupils, because we are only partially succeeding in equipping teachers with the tools with which they may transfer the knowledge they have acquired through the training we give them.
Without going as far as talking about a change of paradigm —this term is surely too strong— I believe we must adopt a radically different approach that places the child at the heart of our mechanism of pedagogic intervention.

An approach that is no longer so focused on the transmission of a world of knowledge about the media, but actually an approach involving the transmission of a world of skills for the child. A media literacy programme that truly supports the child in its psycho-social development, that connects with its interests, that responds to its needs for expression, communication and sharing with others, that helps it to combat the difficulties it encounters with regard to certain aspects of the media, so that there may be, within the child, a distance in relation to its media world.

The first skill that this media literacy programme should seek to develop is the development of critical thinking in pupils, and not just their knowledge about the media. Those who have followed my career will know that, for many years, I have been promoting this marriage between knowledge acquired from the field of research and the teaching of critical thinking in the young, and media literacy.

I won’t go into detail about the deployment of this vast range of intellectual abilities that must be developed in young people if we wish to promote the emergence of their critical thinking. This range may equally include the teaching of the skills of critical thinking and metacognitive skills, as well as strategies for the transfer of thinking skills.

Robert Ennis had this very simple formula to describe the nature of this critical thinking, the emergence of which in young people must be promoted. He said: it is the exercise of intellectual abilities that allows the young person to know What to say? and What to do? in situations during its daily life. These are the skills that allow it to know if things are right for it or not, what it should say and the appropriate actions to take in its everyday life. And it is indeed at school, with the assistance of the teacher and through interaction with its peers, that these creative and critical intellectual abilities may assuredly best be developed.

Thus, a media literacy policy that focuses on the young first and foremost involves teacher training that is centred on the child, on what it experiences and feels at the very moment it experiences and feels something, and not a system of teaching that seeks to lead the child to frequent a world of knowledge —in this case that of the media— while hoping that this will be helpful to it and assist it in developing its critical thinking.

The precondition for media literacy in children

There is, however, a precondition for this change of perspective. It is the necessity for every teacher to have a good knowledge of the relationships between young people and the media. A adequate knowledge of the young person’s media environment is a sine qua non for the teacher who intends to intervene in an appropriate manner and who hopes that their teaching practices will be perceived as relevant by their pupils. Without this knowledge, how in effect can the teacher hope to provide judicious support for the development of the young person in contact with the media?

My regular visits to the staff at the Gameau School allowed me to measure how far the teachers are from being aware of the connection between young people and the media. As one teacher said: “We only see the tip of the iceberg —the most popular television series, the most widely watched cartoons”. But the family and community context of which their
relationship with the media forms a part, the place that they occupy in their pupils’ imagination, what they understand about the content to which they are exposed, that which they gain and that which they seek from this contact with the media—all this remains rather blurred. Above all, the teachers agreed that this lack of knowledge was going to become more marked as the years went by, which left them more and more perplexed, and somewhat off-guard when they have to act appropriately on this subject.

The new face of school

The Garneau School has experienced major upheavals, in common with the majority of schools on the Island of Montreal. These upheavals have had a considerable impact on the way in which the staff are able and are obliged to practice media literacy. The social fabric has been radically transformed, and the school has in a short time gone from one attended by a homogenous school population, made up of the children of French-speaking “born and bred” Quebecois parents, to one where there is a large majority of children from recent immigration.

We are a long way from the situation experienced by the school system in the past, when different waves of immigration, from Italy, Haiti, Vietnam, Chile, etc., were integrated into the public school system in which the great majority of classes consisted of young born and bred French speakers. Today, immigration is broadly based and accounts for the majority. In a single class, there are the children of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Peruvian, Russian, Quebecois, Bulgarian, Laotian, Algerian, and Brazilian parents. You name them, they’re nearly all there.

Garneau is a veritable cultural mosaic in which there mixes a multitude of ethnicities, with no single one occupying a dominant position in numerical terms. Almost 60% of the pupils who attend this school do not have French (the official language of Quebec and the language used in teaching all children of immigrants) as their mother tongue, or use it at home or in the playground. Twenty-six different languages may be heard here, which constitutes a real headache for the school management and for the teachers, who have to communicate with the parents, and with the pupils themselves.

At a cultural level, and in particularly with regard to the relationship with the media, in which we are primarily interested here, all this is accompanied by a radical transformation of the situation that prevailed amongst those who not so long ago attended the Garneau School.

With the advent of radio, and above all television, Quebec had become, over the years, a major producer of original media-based content, more than even the United States in proportion to its population. Productions aimed at children have always occupied a privileged position. By way of example, in its first year of broadcasting, Canadian French-language television devoted a quarter of its output to broadcasts aimed at children. This broadcasting of content for the young has always been maintained, accounting for a substantial proportion. To radio-TV output may be added, throughout the last century, an increasingly varied range of media productions for young consumers: young people’s novels, magazines, films, music, etc., still highly appreciated and used. The young French-speakers of Quebec identified with this media output intended for them, and were very attached to it. These youth media constituted the core of a joint cultural experience that was shared and to which everyone was closely connected in every sense of the term. Now, the situation has been turned com-
pletely upside down. The manifold increase in media services: specialised television networks, programmes on demand, satellite systems, web-radio, and Internet sites of all kinds are radically changing the media environment of young people as much as that of adults. Not only what is available, but also the family and social context in which this media environment is deployed have changed profoundly.

The teaching staff at the Garneau School, who were led to explore the consequences of these transformations in the availability of media, even managed to speak about it with nostalgia, as a cherished bygone age, to describe the relationships they entered into with the media (just as was the case with their parents and grandparents before them), a sort of “golden age” of youth media that no longer exists today.

It is by referring to this “golden age” that they conceive their activities and projects concerning media literacy. However, it is not the media content that the pupils use the most, attracted as they are by the popular media of the major consortiums, especially those from the United States, aimed at an audience of young people the world over.

The media literacy approach that we would like to aim at children must be able to reach them. It must therefore focus on their media-based world, which is incessantly changing and which demands to be constantly updated and catalogued. Is not one of the strengths of the media aimed at the young this capacity that they have to be always creating something new in order to capture the attention of the next generation with a view to gaining its loyalty?

Once they have grasped the necessity of a better understanding of their pupils’ media world, teachers nevertheless often return to their initial reaction, which consists of turning to the “well-known media specialist” and asking him to tell them what they must know. Here, again, lurks a hidden trap. It isn’t a theoretical knowledge of the world of the young and the media that teachers need to acquire, but a shrewd and precise knowledge of what pupils are feeling and thinking. What we need to work on with education professionals is the development of their skills so they may themselves go to seek the knowledge that will be of use to them in establishing their pedagogic interventions. We must induce them to go on a quest for the elements that make up the microenvironment of their class, animated throughout the school year by the interactions between these children from diversified cultural horizons. It is a case of being aware that the media may have different meanings for children who belong to such diverse communities.

For each teacher to be able to draw up a map of the media-based world of the children in their class constitutes the first stage in building a solid base for future pedagogic interventions. This means a process of sharing, the pooling of the experiences of young people, of exchanges of views that will be reinvested in relevant and judicious media-based projects. This also makes it possible to ensure the full participation in media literacy projects of those pupils who encounter difficulties in learning linked to their lack of French, or resulting from attention deficit, which gets worse on contact with the traditional school syllabus. By bringing in multiple learning processes necessitating the manipulation of images, the use of digital technologies, etc., the creation of media-based productions may constitute a solution to the problems of difficulties at school.

However, all this is not as easy to put in place as it would seem. We often measured the point at which teachers rapidly showed signs of impatience to arrive (finally!) at the essential: that is to say, examples of activities related to media literacy, rather than dwelling on the exploration of the media-based world of the young, which demands time and energy.
The objective is to create, together with all the school staff, a place for exchanges of ideas about the discoveries that a better comprehension of the media-based world of young people brings to teachers. They will thus be able to design activities related to media literacy that offer a graded learning system from the time of arrival in preschool class right up until the preparatory year for secondary school.

The “two worlds” of the child from an immigrant background

Although the multi-ethnic environment of the school may at first sight appear unsettling and constitute an additional challenge for the integration of media literacy, it may also prove to be a unique opportunity to achieve its central objective: the development of critical thinking. Some studies that take an interest in this question of the relationship between immigrant children, or children of immigrant families, and the media, clearly establish that the media constitute a means of maintaining a cultural bridge with their country of origin, and promote integration within the host country. What comes out of these studies in an even more interesting way is that they end up by describing children from an immigrant background as being situated “between two worlds”: between the world of “here” (the host country) and the world of “there” (the country of origin). This situation makes them more particularly disposed to develop more of a reflective attitude in relation to the media. These young people are more alert, more conscious of the cultural differences promoted by the media of “here” and “there”, as much in terms of values and representations as in terms of the handling of media content: genres, formats, types of programme, treatment of images, writing, montages, etc.

This particular situation of the child situated between “these two worlds” ensures that it shows aptitudes that favour a more reflective attitude, more able to take a step back, which makes it a more sensitive “receiver” for the observation of differences. This may help us, in our work on media literacy, to get young people to discover the construction of media content, which, for most of the time, escapes their attention, since the fact that they are so used to reading it, or because they are too close to it, means that they do not appear to us to be problematic. It seems to go without saying, to quote the famous expression from Roland Barthes. And we do not see them as subjects worthy of study and reflection. By introducing into the class the “two worlds” of the immigrant child, the systems of influence and the powerful relationships that are maintained between them, and with us, the media may appear more easily and from new angles. Thus, the new reality of the multi-ethnic face of the school, which made the challenge of integrating media literacy even more difficult, becomes, on the contrary, a powerful pedagogic lever that the teacher may use, since it brings together the conditions that favour the emergence of the pupil’s critical mind.

The time of new alliances

Three years ago, just before the start of the teaching programme at the Garneau School, the staff expressed the wish that our media literacy project could be combined with pedagogic interventions to raise awareness of environmental issues among the pupils. This was at a time when we were being bombarded with alarming news in the media concerning the devastating effects of climate change linked to global warming.

I reacted quite badly to this proposal. It seemed to me that we already had plenty to do
in terms of media literacy without having to add the theme of education on the environment. This risked clouding the issue and diverting us from a task that was already highly demanding in terms of pedagogic innovation.

However, this planned collaboration necessitated an approach in which the teachers had to be fully involved at every stage of the project. What I wanted above all else was that our project should be drawn up amongst ourselves and that it should develop in accordance with the needs, expectations and degree of personal commitment of everyone. It was not a case of offering them a programme to imitate, but of supporting them in designing their own strategies for interventions. Some proposals for media literacy, even though they seemed excellent, did not succeed in taking root in the school environment, precisely because the initiatives for pedagogic innovations did not come from the teaching rank and file. Now, it is by cooperation on the ground that the development of sustainable foundations for innovative practices is really made possible, and not via the intermediary of a form of intervention that seeks to impose itself from the top down.

So, although I wasn’t too enthusiastic about this request, I agreed to go along with it and work with the teachers towards the integration of an environmental dimension in the various media projects.

What I feared did not take place, quite the contrary, in fact. Integrating the environment into media literacy activities proved beneficial, even salutary. This allowed me partially to get round the obstacle I mentioned previously, when I spoke of the persistent state of malaise that teachers experience with regard to the knowledge they think they have to have about the world of the media.

Raising awareness of the environment in primary school takes the form of initiatives of the following types: getting the pupil to throw away recoverable waste to be recycled, to learn not to waste drinking water, to use recycled or recyclable material for lessons in the plastic arts, etc.; all the little things that encourage the child’s awareness of the fact that everyone has to play his or her part in the sustainable preservation of the environment, and to inculcate in it the conviction that individual actions can make a difference for the planet. At primary level, we don’t engage in complex thinking or debates on the seriousness of climate change, or the effectiveness of solutions for replacing the problems of energy supplies. The question of the knowledge necessary for the development of pedagogic activities does not arise as in the case of media literacy. At primary level, the necessity of environmental awareness brings about a consensus, and all the teachers feel at ease inviting their pupils to look into the different aspects of this problem. In the same way, the pupils show an interest in these issues, and from the outset agree to take part in the game, participating enthusiastically in these teaching activities.

We incorporated this environmental dimension into our teaching, and it became a totally central part. It was around the various activities involved in raising environmental awareness that the teachers drew up their pedagogic projects that always included a media production on the part of the pupils: short video documents, digital photographs, posters, websites, filmed theatre pieces, advertising spots, news reports for radio or the school newspaper, etc.

And it was from these environmental themes that critical thinking on the media developed, by comparing the pupils’ productions with professional productions, by in-depth investigation of the construction of various messages in the media to ask oneself questions about the pro-
ducers of these media, the population groups for whom these messages were intended, the languages used to influence these sections of the population, and finally all the different fields of the approach to media literacy.

By being combined with environmental awareness — and this could be applied to a whole range of other fields — media literacy can properly fulfil its role as a metadiscipline, through which the young person’s global critical thinking is best able to develop and function.

Another significant challenge for media literacy would be to succeed in developing more and more of this type of beneficial alliance with other fields of knowledge that are interesting for teachers and pupils alike. These collusions, that we will be able to establish using social and cultural themes that maintain their relevance, can be not simply a starting point for an approach to media literacy, but will also be able to demonstrate this relevance and ensure its sustainable integration.

I wanted to deal with “The challenges of media literacy” — I now realise that the title should be in the singular, since it appears to me to be increasingly evident that the principal challenge for media literacy is to join young people in their world of the media in order to support them in the development of their critical thinking with regard to the media.

Jacques Piette | Professor, Université de Sherbrooke
New media landscapes have transformed both the structure of governance and the social functions of media and communication. In the midst of this development of communication and media are our young.

In the days when today’s youth were still infants and toddlers Internet and mobile phones—personal computers, too, for that matter—were unknown to most people. Today, 75 percent of the young people of the European countries use the Internet each day, and 65 percent have access to the web in their homes. The average for young people in the Nordic countries is overall 90 percent. But, the cross-national differences are evident in Europe.

An interactive and mobile communication society is developing alongside traditional mass media. On the whole, media use claims more than half of our leisure time. TV viewing is our dominant leisure activity—but not among young people. There, Internet has taken over that role. Active participants, not passive spectators, the younger generation have been called “the creative generation”.

Clearly, we have witnessed the dawning of a new communication society with new patterns of communication. The functions media serve are changing. Diversification, fragmentation and individualization are frequently recurring themes in analyses of contemporary media output and use. Such central cultural traits as how we define individual integrity and privacy are in flux. In the consumer culture that permeates society today—marking a shift in emphasis from individual needs of yesterday to individual desires today—media play a central role.

Media are among the most powerful social forces of our time, and whether we are talking about the political, economic or cultural sphere, we cannot avoid taking the media into account. Our attempts to understand mass media have tended to treat the media as
being apart from other social institutions — we have asked how the media influence society and culture; what effects mediated messages have on individuals and society, how advertising influences our purchases; how newspaper content influences our political preferences, and so forth. But now, we also need to formulate questions about what people do with the media. All in a new context, viz., the mediatization of society and culture.

Young people’s importance as actors on the market has grown successively the past decades. Young people are of great interest to commercial enterprises of many kinds — children hold the key to future markets. Many computer games, cartoons and websites are a form of advertising in themselves inasmuch as they are the vehicles for “merchandising” to youthful viewers — i.e., the marketing of toys, dolls, clothing, accessories, etc. Product trademarks and logotypes are a nearly universal lingua franca today, a vocabulary shared by young in a good part of the world.

Internet offers arenas for communication, information, knowledge, shopping, entertainment, games, opinion-formation, creativity, artistry — and much, much more. Some of the worldwide web offers media that we know well, albeit with a somewhat broader register. We can partake of traditional mass media — radio, television, film, music, newspapers — to some extent in new forms on a variety of platforms on the web. But what we call ‘social media’ are something entirely different, enabling activities that combine technology, social

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Parents/guardians of children 6-17 years old responding to the question: as far as you know, does your child use the Internet anywhere?
interaction and user-generated content. They include different kinds of fora for discussion, blogs and other sources of comment. The web-based activities that show the strongest growth among young people are those that make possible individual interaction, not least what we call “social networking” — Messenger, Facebook and MySpace — media of conversation and interplay.

Young people’s awareness of the possibilities and risks associated with modern IT is much greater than awareness among parents and other adults. Studies have found that parents know very little about how their children make use of new tools and facilities like Internet. Much of what is available via Internet is terra incognita to many adults – even if parents nowadays, more and more, are catching up with the young generation.

**Regulation, Awareness…**

 Unknown properties of new media technologies have always tended to arouse fears, and, indeed, many parents, teachers and politicians have expressed fears and concern regarding the negative influences of media on children and youth. As long as modern mass media have existed there have been waves of “moral panic” concerning how the media influence our children and youth. These concerns have increased as media technology has advanced. There is particular concern about what we call “harm and offence” in media content that can be distributed ever more widely via satellite/cable television, the Internet, computer games and mobile telephones; violent and pornographic fiction and non-fiction, offensive advertisements, stereotypical and disrespectful depictions of young people, women and minorities, hate-mongering messages, and so forth.

And, there are widespread fears regarding the risks young people expose themselves to on the web through anonymous encounters in the context of social networking. Other new and challenging risks are self-harm, drugs, gambling, addiction, and commercial risks, for example use of personal data. All is about connectivity.

On another front, we have issues relating to illegal downloading and the ramifications of apparently crumbling institutions surrounding intellectual property rights.

For decades different actors have proposed and debated different means to limit the spread of content that may be considered harmful to young people, including laws, self-regulation and co-regulation. Dialogues between authorities, media companies and the public are seeking consensus on general principles, both in individual countries and multilaterally, within the European Union and the United Nations.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year, provides an international framework for these efforts in two key articles. Article 13 states that every child “shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice”. Article 17 calls upon the signatory countries to “ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health”. Toward these ends the convention encourages governments and civil society institutions to “develop appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being”.

The question of media and young people has occupied the EU for a long time, as well. All the EU instruments in the area are consonant regarding the assignment of responsibility for European young people’s well-being. First and foremost, responsibility rests with the adults – parents, teachers and others, but these adults need help in the form of both political decisions and initiatives on the part of the media industry, e.g., codes of ethics and rules that require the industry to assume its share of responsibility vis-à-vis children and youth. We know today that it is not enough to use one or the other instrument if we are to achieve our goals. Instead, we need to achieve effective interaction between legislation, co-regulation and self-regulation. All parties – government, the media industries and civil society – need to develop effective modes of collaboration.

...and Empowerment

Yet, to approach issues relating to young people and media solely in this perspective is too limited, and limiting. In order to attain an all-round framework, viewers’ and users’ perspectives, too, need to be taken into account. Only then will the final piece of the puzzle fall into place. More and more people have come to recognize that modern media, and particularly Internet, also represent social and cultural resources that can empower young people, in both their personal development and their development as members of society, as citizens. These developmental processes involve imagination and creativity as well as learning and knowledge.
A better understanding of media is needed throughout society —among young people—and among parents, teachers and other adults. Proponents of media and digital literacy see better and more widespread knowledge of the media as a stimulus to participation, active citizenship, competence development and lifelong learning. In this way media and digital literacy becomes crucial to ensuring a democratic society. Media and digital literacy is needed for all citizens, but is of decisive importance to the younger generation.

It is recognized that media and digital literacy consists of a number of kinds of knowledge and proficiencies. In addition to access to media, young people (and adults) need an understanding of how the media work, how they create meaning, how the media industries are organized, how they make profit, and the goals toward which they work. Media literacy also means knowing how media can be used and being able to express oneself or express one’s creativity using them, i.e., to produce media content of one’s own. Users also need to be able to avoid and manage the risks media, especially Internet, imply. There is a need for more knowledge in the area of data security and privacy, and copyright aspects of media use.

Thus, there is a perceived need to strengthen young people in their role as users of media to develop their critical faculties and their abilities to express their ideas and creativity in words, sound and images. Media literacy has come to the fore in international and European policy contexts. The first EU policy on media literacy was presented by the European Commission in December 2007. Viviane Reding, the Commissioner responsible for the Information Society and Media, termed media literacy “crucial for achieving full and active citizenship. […] People need a greater awareness of how to express themselves effectively, and how to interpret what others are saying, especially on blogs, via search engines or in advertising” (European Commission press release, 20 December 2007). One year later, in December 2008, the European Parliament adopted a report on media literacy in a digital world —which stressed the importance of media literacy in the information society. Parliament urged the Commission to adopt a recommendation and develop an action plan on media literacy. This work is now under way, and the Commission has announced that a proposal for a Recommendation on media literacy will be presented during the second half of 2009.

The importance of media education in the schools cannot be overstated. In the European Union there is widespread agreement that the schools should assume responsibility for ensuring that children’s media culture is incorporated into the curriculum. Not only theoretical knowledge, but hands-on experience is envisaged.

Conclusions

We live in a mediated symbolic environment that strongly influences our choices, our values and the information/knowledge that guides us in our everyday lives. Our striving for meaning in life and for enlightened, responsive and democratically decided order in society requires a greater awareness and knowledge of the media that influence so much of our lives. We need to learn more from one another, to share knowledge and context.

Research can play an important part - mutual exchanges between policy institutions and the research community can contribute to generating the kind of knowledge that the situation calls for. Professor Sonia Livingstone conclude from her study EU Kids Online that

*Balancing empowerment and protection is crucial and will require a mix of regulation, media literacy and improved interface design… Policies to*
balance the goals of maximising opportunities and minimising risks require an evidence-based approach. (Livingstone, 2009)

Many pressing issues facing politicians and policy-makers today have to do with digital media and phenomena in cyberspace. The EU has to debate the Internet of the future and issues relating to on whose terms the new web should operate and whose needs it should fill. These issues touch on vital democratic functions and sensibilities. Finally, we must not lose sight of the fact that the “arteries” in the media landscape are creations of political will… This is true of internet and mobile telephones as well as television and, even earlier, radio frequencies, etc. Without a political will there will be no development…

But we should also have in mind —from our European perspective— that good governance and global leadership are more essential than ever in the age of rapid globalization and digitization. There is a need for multilateral solutions to vital global issues. Issues of democracy and development are central, and several of these have a strong media and communication component— not least issues regarding young people and Internet. There is a need to spell out the meaning and ramifications of a global governance system— in our commercialized media landscape operating on a transnational scale. Clearly, here are links between good governance on the global, regional and national levels. But, global governance currently faces multiple problems —not least with multi-polarity. The risk is great that constellations of nations, acting in their own common interests, will take over —to the exclusion of many nations in the world. The need for more effective global governance poses a significant challenge to the European Union and the Council of Europe. Successful international institutions are essential although governance on the regional and national levels are the masters of those very institutions. That truth lies at the core of how we treat the most important issues regarding children, youth and media in Europe and all over the world.

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Bibliography


A few pointers for research into media literacy

Research into media literacy\(^1\) forms part of research into human and social sciences, whether it borrows from one of them, or, as is more often the case, from a number of them at the same time. One may produce the history or even the geography of practices in media literacy carry out a semiological or semio-pragmatic analysis of certain messages (from the web, or traditionally, television) and place it in relation to the perceptions of certain “citizen-consumers”, study the costs, in an educational system, of the introduction of a systematic policy of media literacy; one may then seek to assess its impact on diverse populations, from a cognitive, psychological, or behavioural point of view, study the sociological or even the cultural profile of people involved in this type of activity, work on a philosophy or a didactic methodology for éducation aux médias, etc.

Thus, research into éducation aux médias falls under the rules and restrictions of research into human and social sciences: epistemological, theoretical, methodological and contextual choices – and this does not exclude a certain specificity, as we will see.

Now, the more the practices involved in éducation aux médias have been developed, throughout the whole world, what’s more, and in some countries for almost forty years, or just recently in others, the more —and this is a recurring constant— research in this field is lacking.

\(^1\) Due to the differences of meaning between the French expression “éducation aux médias” and his usual English translation, “media literacy”, we keep some time the original French expression. [Note from the translation.]
There are a number of reasons for this: suspicion of, not to say contempt for, academic research into these “bad objects” that are the media and information and communication technologies; the blurring that surrounds this expression éducation aux médiases (close but different from —we will come back to this— the Anglo-Saxon expression media literacy), “discipline or collection of enthusiasms?” as the Italian researcher Pier Cesar Rivoltella wondered; the difficulty in attaching this sector of research to a specific discipline in accordance with the categoric imperative of the university institution —educational sciences? Or ITC sciences? Or even cognitive or political sciences? There is also the fact that this is a relatively new field —this is easily acknowledged— compared with the traditions of research into history, philosophy, and even sociology and semiology.

There are doubtless plenty of other reasons. But in the following, I would like to draw in a few reference markers which will allow us to define any specificity in this type of research, particularly in order to distinguish it from the much broader field covered by the expression “media literacy”2. This will lead us, in conclusion, to envisage the necessary development of paradigms if we don’t want to be perpetually “reinventing the wheel” but rather actually to commit both research and practice to the new demands of education in the 21st century.

**Media literacy and éducation aux médias: or the necessity to distinguish the educational process and the result of this action**

The discrepancy between these two expressions, the one English (media literacy), the other French (éducation aux médias) has often been emphasised: the first, a set of knowledge, skills and behaviours —refers to that which may possibly— produce the second, either a programme of training that is more or less voluntary, more or less formal, more or less institutional: which does not exclude, in this field as in others, the possibility of self-education, particularly if we consider that regular use of media and technologies of any type may allow anyone to progress to an initial level of independent learning. Nowadays, the British sometimes speak of “Media literacy education” so as to place firm emphasis on the educational activity that serves the development of media-related skills and knowledge. Éducation aux médias is therefore not the equivalent of “media literacy” and éducation aux médias is not the only activity contributing to the development of “media literacy”, whether in terms of the public as a whole or the young population in particular. The school is no longer the sole partner, even if it remains the main one, in educating young people about the media: parents may contribute, associations, television networks, regulatory authorities, journalists, etc. This is without taking into account the fact that the adult population also needs to develop media skills, and that actions of “creative DIY3” have already developed in accordance with mechanisms that are certainly still excessively influenced by school-based models, and one may regret that research into

2. For a useful representation of the respective positions of these two concepts, one may refer to the chart drawn up by Pérez Tornero José Manuel: “Media literacy, New Conceptualisation, New Approach” in Empowerment through Media Education, An Intercultural Dialogue, CARSSON U., JACQUIN-DELAUNAY G., PÉREZ TORNERO, J.M., (Eds), The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth, and Media, Nordicom, Goteborg University, 2008, p. 106

3. As shown notably in Brussels in the second preparatory seminar for EuroMeduc on lifelong media literacy, November 2008.
éducation aux médias is still of too little interest to this wider public. This recurring failure to distinguish between what some call the process and the product is doubtless one of the reasons that explains the dearth of evaluative research carried out on the practices involved in éducation aux médias, and, after so much experience accumulated all over the world, the current level of mobilisation, particularly in the European Community, for the drawing up of a set of criteria defining media literacy or the process of achieving media literacy, a necessary prerequisite for anyone who wishes to equip themselves with the means of verifying the influence or even the effectiveness of the various types of initiatives regarding media literacy.

In addition, this non-distinction has the disadvantage of frequently making us forget that while media literacy involves a knowledge of existing research into information and communication technologies, it also falls within the category of research into education and training; too often, we forget to work on the educational theories or concepts that are at the origin of our concerns regarding media literacy, and, in the school setting, on the teaching methods — and their possible differential effects — used by those involved in teaching media literacy. We have experienced, and still experience, masterly classes in film analysis and “civilised” debates on what was pleasing or displeasing in this or that television programme or series, under the pretence of training in critical thinking, or amusing “spontaneous” situation scenarios involving output from pupils replacing the demanding processes of creation that are supervised and monitored right up until final expertise is achieved in the whole chain of production/distribution/critical analysis.

One may take the example of two researchers into media literacy who have particularly illustrated the importance of this reference to the educational dimension: the Quebec-born researcher, Jacques Piette, who, having observed that the majority of initiatives regarding media literacy insist on training in critical thinking, without ever defining it, turned away from educational sciences and turned in particular towards the movement for the teaching of critical thinking in order to deepen this concept of critical thinking and make it operational within the field of media literacy. Plus there is the French researcher Sergio Samiento, who has sought to clarify the educational theories or conceptions that underlie the practices involved in media literacy, as others have done for theories on the media, based on the precise example of a substantial academic initiative in France.

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5. See the report on the first preparatory seminar for this Congress on media literacy by means of output from young people, Paris, July 2008.
7. “Critical thinking movement”, a movement that developed in North America at the start of the 80s.
Analysis of usual practices in the media and éducation aux médias: and of the necessity to distinguish the “subject” of the research from its “context”

Although there exists a real lack of proportion between the wealth and diversity of practices grouped under the generic term “éducation aux médias” and the small amount of research devoted to this subject, on the other hand, much research deals with what indeed seems to be a precondition for any initiative regarding media literacy, namely a precise knowledge of the possibilities of access to media and technologies and the types of use made of them by various user groups: from which it emerges that one may, on a global basis and somewhat rapidly, accept, whatever the methodology employed, call for an analysis of usage. This is why I propose to call, in carrying out this research, on the relationship between young people and the media, or the not-so-young and the media, or this or that category of young people, research that is contextual in relation to media literacy. Here again one may cite examples that are already “historical”, inasmuch as this research must be constantly brought up to date, taking into account the rapid development of the media environment as well as socio-cultural contexts: namely the European research Himmelweit I (1958) and II (1998) into the relationships between young people and the single television screen of the time in the case of the first survey, and the new media environment in the second10; or more recently the various reports on the European research programme EU Kids On line, version II of which is planned for 2009-2011 (www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EUKids).

Admittedly, these research programmes have a priority objective of producing knowledge of what population groups do with the media and technologies that they use11; but on the one hand they may have an impact in educational terms, if ever the results are presented to those surveyed; and on the other hand they should serve as a basis for any initiative regarding media literacy if we want to establish their pertinence and thus for all research into media literacy: how do we give an educational initiative on media literacy a theoretical and practical basis, implement it, monitor it and then assess its impact, without having an exact idea of the local media situation, in other words, how do we pose a relevant question for our research? Can we undertake research into media literacy as training in critical thinking in a socio-political context that favours creative participation in community life? Can we consider the problem of the influence of media globalisation in an African country where only a small elite has access to a large number of networks? Or consider the principle of media literacy as a fundamental human right when that involves defending democratic values that are not

11. It is this that is dealt with as a priority, for young users, by The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media in its various publications including the Yearbook published in English since 1998: on the other hand, only a few sections of a few issues focus more specifically on media literacy, www.nordicom.gu.se.
equally shared by all countries as testified to in 2007\(^{12}\) by representatives of Turkey, Morocco and the Arab nations? The differences are doubtless smaller within Europe; still, we must take them into account and in particular not be content simply to “apply” the recommendations of a European Charter, but seek to transpose them to the local context.

**Theories, models and issues concerning éducation aux médias**

If there is one dimension that is severely lacking in research into éducation aux médias, it is that of theories and models. Initiatives are undertaken, practices (known as ‘good’ practices) are listed, local and national policies are drawn up, and evaluations are attempted, most of the time without clarification of the theories that inspired them. These theories are inevitably a combination of theories on the media and theories on education, and they should develop along with the latter to inspire models for educational intervention. It comes back to research to contribute to these explanations, “in order to know what one is doing while one is doing it”.

Various theoretical paradigms have fed international research into the media, and, as a consequence, into the concepts of media literacy. The semiological approach, for example, has long had a considerable influence on the practices involved in éducation aux médias, particularly in France. The Anglo-Saxon approach, inspired by cultural studies, for its part, as David Buckingham has remarked, has to a greater extent and more rapidly helped with the conception of initiatives in media literacy as moments of interaction between “pupils’ day-to-day knowledge of the media and the more academic knowledge they encounter within the institutional context of the school\(^{13}\)”.

In general terms, we have been able to observe that the theories that have influenced the practices involved in éducation aux médias in France and more generally in Europe are more usually those theories connected to the sciences of information and communication — depending on the various paradigms according to the respective time and action group — whereas in Latin America, it is usually socio-political, cultural and religious theories that fulfil this role.

Theoretical educational paradigms, too, have in a more or less explicit way inspired the practices of éducation aux médias. Jacques Gonnet\(^{14}\), in his attempt to create a genealogy of the practices of éducation aux médias, recalled the importance of the “new teaching principles” of the late 21st century that looked at the child in a new light, seeking to take account of its motivation and thus its interests, and to make pedagogic initiatives part of the individual’s life experience, linked to a number of tools: with regard to young people in Europe, one thinks of the “Freinet techniques” based on a concept of training through working with the techniques and tools available at the time, namely printing work; for adults and in Latin

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13. Les jeunes et les médias, Perspectives de la recherche dans le monde, Jacquinot G (Ed.), l’Harmattan, coll. Débats Jeunesses, 2002, p 112. We may note that Buckingham includes research into éducation aux médias along with general research into relations between young people and the media while we seek to distinguish them (and not to compare them): this has the advantage of placing them in theoretical lines of descent in relation to the media, but also on the other hand of reducing the importance of the educational dimension.

America, of the theory of “raising awareness” propounded by Paulo Freire; he, too, did not separate the actions involved in education from the activities involved in production. As Jacques Piette already said (p. 287) in the conclusion to his research: “the dimension connected to educational practices should, in future, constitute the cornerstone of thinking on the way in which media literacy must develop.”

In addition, the clarification of theoretical paradigms, both media-related and educational, is liable to inspire essential models for educational intervention if we wish to succeed in developing, if not generalising, practices for media literacy. Here, again, is a field of investigation that falls well short of meeting current requirements. A model drawn up in the 70s was widely distributed and has for a long time driven initiatives for media literacy in a number of countries: it proposed, with regard to the mass media, the exploration of 6 “concepts”: representation, language, gender, technology, institution and audience (for the mediarelated side); this took place through a set of activities from analysis and reflection to creation (for the educational side).

The danger with models is that their distribution is all too often accompanied by rigidification or even deviation: when it was put into use, on the one hand there was a tendency to organise these activities separately —here the analysis of representations, there the analysis of language, somewhere else analysis of the audience, much more rarely, by all accounts, analysis of the media institution— while the advantage of the model came from an analysis of the interactions between these different dimensions. What is more, when reapplied today, without any precaution, to digital media it loses its relevance: we need new models.

The growth of the media context demands that we go beyond the traditional approaches to the media and their uses in order to enter into a perspective that some propose to call more “ecological”, taking into account the diversity of materials and situations (collective use, for example) allowing us to consult, view, or even produce multimedia messages; at the same time, the educational context in the classroom, and also outside the classroom, necessitates a more environmental concept of learning than is thought of in modern theories on situated learning15 in which learning is no longer seen as an activity involving transmission but as the result of a concrete action and a social interaction, or in new learning environments made up of human and non-human partners.

Media literacy, digital literacy, information literacy... or towards the creation of a field of specific research into the new digital environment

Technological developments being what they are, we have seen a progressive change during discussions —and also in practice and in research— from media literacy to digital literacy, while perpetuating the same ambiguities regarding the lack of distinction between the knowledge and skills to be acquired (the result) and the educational actions performed depending on the various user groups and contexts to this end (the process); on the insufficient distinction between the studies that I have called contextual, a precondition for the conception of media literacy and the specific research into initiatives for media literacy; and finally on

the lack of explanation of theoretical presuppositions, as much in media terms as in educational terms, which inspire the practices or policies of media literacy.

Not only that —the appearance of these new technologies (arising from technological convergence) is rekindling old debates, often poorly expressed, on the difference/lack of difference between media literacy and media education: although it is true that using one or more of the media in the teaching of a discipline is not the same as taking one or more of the media as the subject of analysis, it is also true that except by removing all meaning from the practice itself, one may not reasonably use a fiction-based film to teach history without working on the fictional cinematographic treatment, nor analyse the composition of the front page of a newspaper by abstracting information from the contents!

And this systematic dissociation —for a long time now I have been using the term “schizophrenia” — between media literacy and media education is still less relevant today, when these digital technologies make it possible to be alternately —or even simultaneously— producer and receiver of various types of message: participating in a blog or social network, means being able to read as much as being able to react by producing something personal or collective… and in these two cases, what is important is to be aware of the issues and restrictions involved in this type of participation.

For “one is not born a web-surfer, one becomes one!”16. The familiarity and skill evidenced by younger generations compared with their elders should create no illusion17: all on-the-ground studies and research prove it: having easy access to the Internet does not mean knowledge of how to master the tool and its functions, or an awareness of the economic, ethical and legal issues involved. As for the problem of processing information —which has also given rise to information literacy18 (or the teaching of information to create information literacy) it once again adds to the ambiguities, on the one hand, taking into account the polysemy of the term which will not have the same meaning in the documentary or journalistic context; on the other, because information to which the Internet provides access encompasses very different realities, information in the sense of a piece of news, of course, but also different services, databases and knowledge, not to mention relational information. Now here again all research and observations converge, which underlines the superficiality of the use made by pupils of resources on the Internet “In actual fact, they very quickly become consumers, they don’t analyse. They have the impression that here are the solutions, all made available, so why go to any trouble?”19. Their fascination with this mode of easy access to information hinders their critical thinking —a concept which is rightly at the core of any media literacy; I would even say any type of education.

The transition from media literacy including information literacy to digital literacy covers

16. Title given to a CLEMI workshop on education on Internet media, following the example of what Simone de Beauvoir wrote sixty years ago with regard to women in Le deuxième sexe, Gallimard, 1949.
17. See the report on the third preparatory seminar for this Congress on media literacy and the appropriation of the Internet by the young, Faro, February 2009.
18. Defined by the OECD in 1995 as “the ability to comprehend and use written information in daily life, at home, at work, and in the community with a view to achieving one’s personal goals and broadening one’s knowledge and abilities”, a minimum definition that does not explicitly include the critical dimension.
political and commercial issues that we should not let ourselves be fooled by. On the other hand, comparing a broad and ambitious conception of media literacy (not always evidenced by an inventory of existing practices!) with a restrictive and instrumental vision of digital literacy (widely attested to, which can only be regretted) would make us risk losing sight of the true issue at stake, which is the rethinking of education within the context of the new media-based environments. Research must contribute to this.

During the international forum for researchers into the relationship between young people and the media held at the end of the 20th century (Paris, 1997; Sydney, 2000), the report drawn up from collected contributions and the debates arising from them made it possible to signpost some new trends in research and concluded on the necessity of a new theoretical and methodological framework, amongst other things for the purpose of relevant thinking on initiatives for media literacy. The three preparatory seminars at EuroMeduc, the second European Congress on éducation aux médias or media literacy (depending on the language used), only marginally tackled this theme of research.

Now, in the early 21st century, this renewal of the theoretical and methodological framework is more topical than ever, since the convergence is not just technological: it brings with it many other changes, in particular those of an industrial, cultural and social nature.

The cultural industries may be seen in the context of a process of globalisation, and, rallying their forces, they are causing major new international players to appear, who interfere in national projects: this leads to the phenomena of deregulation and privatisation of public companies with a knowledge of the media throughout the world. A new current of research is taking an interest in these developments in the specific field of cultural industries, which represents what is called the knowledge industries.

However, this also involves a major cultural change in that consumers are being encouraged to search for information, to discover new information by browsing, to connect to disparate media content amongst themselves, to create new conditions for interpersonal and community-based communication, to become alternately producers and consumers of a still-emerging so-called “participant” culture —some talk of a “third age of culture” that is not that of “reproducibility” (Walter Benjamin) but “remixability”. As Henry Jenkins said: “convergence is situated in the brains of individual consumers through their social interactions with others”, which cannot fail to have consequences on relationships with knowledge and learning, and more specifically, it seems to me, to lead us to move from what we have hitherto called éducation aux médias [or media literacy] to the creation of a veritable digital culture that is still too restricted to familiarisation with technical devices. And this task is all the more difficult as it is not easy to predict the future of these technological developments, nor of the social and cultural changes in the context of which they are taking place, and, what is more, to which they are contributing.

20. Les jeunes et les médias Perspectives de la recherche dans le monde, op. cit.
23. Note from the translation.
However, it seems urgent, for research that has to be the leader in this field, to adopt a more globalising and dynamic approach. Currents of research arising from groupings of different disciplines may, at this point in time, nurture our thinking: they emanate as much from the cognitive sciences as from studies into the different types of literacy and works on digital environments for human learning.

They involve, in particular:

- working not on media or technologies but on media-based environments and the diversity of their functioning processes (individual/collective, fixed/mobile, textual/multimedia, capitalisable/ephemeral, private space/public space, etc.);
- never dissociating media-based practices from the other social and cultural practices with which they are in a state of constant interrelation;
- taking account of the permeability between public space and private space, and, for young people of school age in particular, of the major current disparity, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, highlighted by research programmes, between practices at school and practices in the home;
- the change in methods of appropriating the technology on offer and as a consequence other learning — still necessary, of course, but which is taking place much more often, amongst the young in particular, in an informal and horizontal way, between peers.

Who would be prepared to commit themselves to a research programme that would make it possible to understand “what is being learned, by whom, and how?” in this class, that I will intentionally not call a “media class”, but a very short class, as described by a teacher reflecting on her “new” job: “Learning to use the Internet together then becomes a means of recreating an intergenerational link on the theme of ICT… integrating, amongst other things, this source of knowledge and information to facilitate learning, this avoids going back into a sterile rivalry with it. Beyond the necessity of not appearing to be resistant to progress, working together with digital resources is also, for teachers, a way of retaining credibility in the eyes of pupils while not depriving themselves of the benefits they can derive from it”.

I would readily add that this is the sole means of contributing, above all at school, to the creation of a true digital culture that is still all too often reduced, at worst, to simple familiarisation with technical devices, or at best, to “rather special niches” of media classes, more or less all of which we present here.

The digital culture remains to be built, not just in opposition to “digital fracture” as it is so often called, but in order to take account of technological convergence and its consequences in relation to information, communication, the appropriation of knowledge, means of expression and more generally the education of the individual and the citizen, and not to feed what I have called “educational divergences” or what sociologist François Dubet calls “the crisis of the institutional school syllabus”.

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Community services such as Youtube, MySpace and picture galleries along with Wikipedia and blogs involve users into public and social knowledge creation, mostly in commercial and international media environments. These kinds of online public media work in the interest of young people: the opportunity to interact and to come up with their own media work. Youth researchers talk about “mediated youth cultures,” where the uses of several media (e.g. internet, mobile, television) as well as the modes of expression, i.e. music, text and visual added to their multimodalities, are integrated in the everyday lives of the young through the participatory cultures online (f. ex. Hodkinson 2007; Jenkins et. al. 2009).

How to be visible and how to be heard in information societies, if not via media? This question is linked to the mediated youth cultures and to the discussions of citizenry in contemporary Europe. For the young, acting on media publicity for example in online communities can belong to every day practices. Hanging around only online, i.e. acting only in media cultures, is not a sure way to learn how to be as media literate as is necessary for participating in contemporary information societies. On the other hand, researchers have found “digital divides” among the young in Europe concerning the quality of the activities online. For example, low speed broadband access or not so up-to-date software entail unequal access to opportunities for expression online. Moreover, discriminatory factors among the users generate poor media literacy skills or even media illiteracy. (Livingstone and Helsper 2007; Jenkins et. al. 2009).

The need for enhancing media literacy is widely recognised in European societies. I will shortly discuss appropriation of media literacy and youth empowerment mainly based on my recent studies in Finland, conducted among youngsters aged 13-18 (Kotilainen 2009; Kotilainen & Rantala 2009).
Media literacy is more than access online

Analyzing the roots of media literacy education in its articulation with citizenship requires to take into account the histories of national awakening, utilitarianism, and the rise of labour movements in Western societies since the late eighteenth century, in conjunction with the rise of modern media. In Scandinavia, and in Finland specifically, the roots go deep to the long tradition in folk (people) education. Basic literacy had an important impact on workers’ efficiency, but it also developed their faculties to know their rights and gave them an overall sense of empowerment in society. From this vantage point, the present time —global media culture— seems to be marking yet another era in the long story of folk education. The multiple new literacies such as media literacy refer to various competences, coping strategies, and survival skills needed in current times (Kotilainen & Suoranta 2007).

The skills related to media literacy are mostly summarised in four areas of ability: access, analysis, evaluation and creative production or into three areas: use, understand and create. All these abilities boost aspects of personal development: consciousness, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities [see for example Buckingham 2003; Varis 2009]. I agree with Tapio Varis [2009] how he puts critical thinking:

“…Critical thinkers see the future as open and malleable, not as closed and fixed. They are aware of the diversity of values, behaviors, social structures and artistic forms in the world. Critical thinking is a process, not an outcome and it is emotive as well as rational.” (e.g.)

Henry Jenkins et. al. (2009, 56) list skills and competencies that the young should acquire to be full participants in the emerging participatory culture online, where the key elements are sharing and taking part. For example, play and simulation are current media literacy skills “that enable participation in new communities emerging in networked society.” Moreover, important competencies listed are judgement (the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources) and negotiation (the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives) (e.g.). I like to add at least bravery and motivation to take part in public discussions, and on the other hand the risk awareness and skills for protecting one’s privacy. These two aspects, social participation through media and risk awareness, are both important elements of contemporary media literacy.

Through learning —even partly— such media literacies described above it is possible to get oneself empowered. Empowerment is increased “self-power” for one’s identity creation and actions in contemporary media culture. For example, empowerment can be noticed as increased social and ethical participation on public networks, on media or in more comprehensive self-protection online. While talking about young people, a “seeker” can turn to a “communicator” or even “activist”. For example, in our Finnish study, increased media literacy seemed to be linked to the young people’s overall well-being (Kotilainen and Rantala 2009; cf. Jenkins et. al. 2009).

Focus on youth voice

Appropriation of media literacy among the young happens by acting in media cultures AND through media education. All children, youngsters and adults need tutoring in media literacy because learning media is a lifelong process. Media environment is continually changing and converging: pure technical skills are not enough for anybody anymore. I am arguing
for such media pedagogic orientations which probe the contemporary public media, young people’s own interests and educational aims. For example, for the young it seems to be important to get experiences of getting heard by others, especially by adults, through their media works (Kotilainen, 2009).

The Finnish evaluative study (Kotilainen, 2009; Kotilainen and Rantala, 2010) was conducted in two local media educational projects aiming to strengthen the youths’ voice in civic affairs through several media: local and national youth websites, national newspaper and national television channel. Projects were implemented in cooperation with local youth work, school and media, in both cases municipal youth work organizations running the projects. We were two researchers following the development for three years 2005–2008, and collecting data mainly among the young participants by mixed methods including, for example, a questionnaire (N=586), several rounds of interviews and diaries. Additionally, media educators and media professionals were interviewed. Project memos and memos of researcher’s consultations were analysed, too.

The results suggest that one important element is media publicity, which allows mainstream audiences to hear the voices of young people. More work should be done to develop cross-generational interaction i.e. adults being audiences for youth media productions and youth voices being heard by adults. Researcher Peter Levine (2008) suggests “strategies for building audiences”: it seems that this is one of the main tasks in planning media education today. Implementing youth media for the young audiences is important, but for all young people it is not enough: they need cross-generational audiences for generating discussions and getting their voice out in the public sphere. All media forms and mixed media —youth publicity and cross-generational publicity— can be used, including blogs and communities online.

But how can we know what young people really learn about media publicity, as regards for example ethics on publishing one’s own material or the rights of interviewed person? Or issues of risk awareness? Doing media themselves is not enough to increase their understanding of how media publicity works. In these studied projects several ethical issues were discussed with the young in project meetings and in class rooms (Kotilainen, 2009).

As for pedagogic practices, the research showed the importance of creating communities of learners including interaction and reflection possibilities with peers, teachers and youth workers, i.e. adult as co-learner and supervisor (cf. Wenger, 1998). Additionally, the themes for discussions and contents for media work should arise from young people, not from adults’ ideas. Participatory actions integrated to media production should be supported, i.e. getting real experiences of “having a say” (Kotilainen, 2009; Kotilainen and Rantala, 2010).

One of the youth workers interviewed is acting as producer of the youth media work and organising youth contacts to public media. He talks about a certain “participation ideology” which is present in every situation, also pedagogically, in their project (Kotilainen, 2009):

“The participation ideology is so visible in our project. It includes a background philosophy of the young as central actors. Young people are making decisions, planning and doing themselves… Our starting point is that everybody can participate and influence everything, and just trying to have your say is valuable.” (e.g.)

The main challenges mentioned by the youth workers we interviewed are linked to a new project which requires new modes of cooperation in the youth department and with media. They had to earn the trust of the administrators in the department and the leaders in media
companies. In spite of this and many more challenges, the media educators (teachers and youth workers) engaged in both projects are willing to continue. Inadequate media competences of youth workers and teachers are one of the main challenges: they need, for example, to know more about how media organisations and media publicity work (Kotilainen, 2009; Kotilainen and Rantala, 2010).

**Media literacy to schools in Europe**

Talking about appropriation of media literacy, my additional understanding is more societal, spanning the overall national and European policies of media literacy education. What would be the best way to promote media literacy in European societies? Certainly there are several ways because of different cultures. In Finland, the enthusiasts of media literacy education come from several sectors: school, youth work organisations, libraries, cultural organisations as media and film centres and administrators from local to national governance. The researchers and other experts of media literacy and education established a national association in 2005 for generating cooperation among experts coming from different fields and pushing forward media literacy in Finnish society. For example, it is developing online services for national actors of media education with the funding of the ministry of education (see www.mediaeducation.fi).

This year our ministry of education is willing to study small children’s media use (0-8 years) for planning media literacy education specific to them in the future. Moreover, the national board of education is evaluating all cross-curricular themes – communication and media skills included - in basic schooling (9th graders) within the next two years. These kinds of actions are slight positive signs to me as a researcher of this area. According to a national survey conducted by the Ministry of law and justice (OM 5/2005), the main problems in media literacy education are the continuing project-orientation and lack of stable funding: when projects end, the follow-up may fail. Additionally, the training of teachers is still poor.

In the whole Europe, Finland included, the key question is the appropriation of media literacy in schools, where children and young people are learning the most every day. How to give media literacy a prominent place in schools and make access to learning media possible for every child?

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EuroMeduc: an European Exchange Network
Relations between media literacy and production may be the subject of very different opinions. As for what concerns us, we might say that in the current context they lead to a reversible process of questioning that is summed up in a very broad outline as follows:

- Is media production by young people essential for media literacy?
- Is media literacy essential for media production by young people?

These two questions echo different positions and contexts and call for responses along varied lines.

Is one bound to embark on a production using one of the media, of whatever type (newspaper, radio, blog) in order to work on media literacy? No, of course not. There is nothing compulsory about it — it is a matter of choice, which leads to a particular approach.

Does engaging in media production give you a better understanding of how the professional media function? Yes, sometimes, and in a striking way, but this is not systematic. It all depends on the pedagogic context.

We could also list a series of questions-responses on the links between the production of media-based messages and media literacy. But we can sum it up thus: “Yes, production is an important and facilitating choice, but its “effects” are essentially the fruit of a chosen approach, correctly appropriated”.

In parallel to this, here in the early 21st century, media production, particularly that which comes from the young, is literally exploding. Above all, it takes the form of a spontaneous and individualised increase in the number of blogs and various productions put on line via social networks or “pocket films”…

Media literacy and production by young people: an old response to increasingly up-to-date questions
This large-scale emergence of these media and their omnipresent nature provokes all sorts of questions that return to the current development of the media. Are we/are they all on their way to becoming journalists, or at least producers? Will these productions end up by supplanting certain segments of the professional media? How aware are these new producers of their responsibilities? Up to what point will these messages be considered as sources for the media?

These questions reveal the worries aroused by the suddenness of this phenomenon and its widespread distribution in all directions. In this context, we often mention the necessity of media literacy. This link may be perceived in the texts from the Commission. Production skills have not always enjoyed unanimous support in the definitions up to now. This situation has changed abruptly.

Let us simply recall that in her recent declaration made in August 2009 regarding media literacy, Viviane Reding pointed out that: “Today, being able to read and write, in other words traditional literacy, is no longer sufficient. We must increase people’s awareness of the means of expressing themselves effectively and interpreting the information that they receive, especially via blogs, search engines or advertising…”

Thus, “expressing oneself effectively” now comes to the top of the list of aspects of media skills. In this “effectiveness”, we may also understand “without damage, without prejudice”… V. Reding continues, saying that it is better to educate than legislate.

Media literacy makes it possible to regulate, at least in part, this production, while guaranteeing that a minimum of thinking and legal or ethical knowledge guides these practices. This education plays a preventive and/or curative role, compared with certain aimless wanderings, by promoting self-regulation and the acceptance of individual responsibility.

These two differing modes of questioning lead us back to some approaches that are already outdated. The first works dealing with media literacy, at the beginning of the nineteen-seventies, focused largely on the knowledge of media systems and on the transmission of critical thinking centred on the analysis of messages. This, let us remember, was also the moment when the contents of the totally new sciences of information and communication were written up. Media literacy presented itself as the extension of this content and of this scholarly knowledge, both in a school setting and in the broader educational field.

The plan to approach this content by means of inciting media production by young people appeared fairly quickly. This approach arose mainly amongst pedagogues and educators, out of a way of thinking about learning methods. The most dynamic took their inspiration largely from the theories of “New Education” and pedagogy involving “learning by doing”.

It was indeed a case of seizing the opportunity to facilitate media literacy using reality and personal experience by promoting the production of media or media messages with the final aim of allowing everyone high-quality expression, with a democratic citizen-based outlook. They thus concurred with Dewey, Freinet and Decroly. The media side of production further reinforced the sought-after effects of socialisation.

Those educators, therefore, already committed to these methods, quite naturally took over this way of thinking that came as a harmonious complement to their approach. Reciprocally, certain educators, who were aware of what this practical approach could bring to young people and adults alike, committed themselves to it in the name of media literacy.
But let’s return to our very first question. Analysis and production are complementary in terms of their concepts and methods, but does the production of media-based messages constitute a sufficient condition for the acquisition of media literacy skills? A number of observations and studies have tackled this question directly or indirectly and have attempted to assess whether the act of producing makes one more critical and perspicacious with regards to the media.

We shall quote two examples: The study on “Evaluation of practices in media literacy: their effects on teachers and pupils.” (De Smedt, Bevort, Cardy, Garcin-Marrou, 1999) and the research developed in Great Britain by the NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) and the BFI (British Film Institute) in 2006: “Special effects: the distinctiveness of learning outcomes in relation to moving image education projects”, (Lord, Jones, Harland, Bazalgette, Reid and alii).

Although the subjects of research are centred on different concerns and materials, the results obtained are very close once they concern the effects of the production of media documents by young people… In both cases, we observe that the situations in which production took place generated strong points linked to the pleasure engendered by the activity of production (newspapers and radio in the first case, production of films and videos in the second) and by the practical achievement of a media production.

We notice a certain re-motivation in the school, a certain well-being in the class, in particular among young people in difficulties, a feeling of coherence between school life and life outside school…

Among the strong points, we also note an improved capacity for working together and organising tasks on a collective basis. There was clear progress in terms of technical skills: mock-ups, of the journalistic type in one case, and the film production type in the other.

On the other hand, the two studies show that certain points are not so straightforward.

These are those that are most closely linked to media literacy in terms of quality. In the British research, we note that there is no real progress in the fields of aesthetics. Awareness and knowledge have not made progress in this field. Individual expression has had trouble developing, and we cannot see any progress in the film or audiovisual culture.

On the Franco-Belgian side, we were able to observe that the acquisition of media literacy skills: improved understanding of the production and functioning of the media, ability to express an appreciation with regard to professional productions… did not take place automatically, and that it depended directly on the way in which production activities were offered and conducted. It emerges that these activities necessitated a form of support that was able to beyond the simple technical operations and bring out the link between the production phases and the critical dimensions on which they were able to shed light. If this operation did not take place, the effects were feeble or even non-existent.

These two studies clearly show that projects involving media productions bring about a highly positive dynamic for young people and establish much more favourable working relationships. However, they are not sufficient to bring about immediate progress in the critical and creative capacities of individuals. Those providing support must train themselves for these interventions and must have thought out their forms of intervention. The creative dimension of expression is probably one of the most complex to activate. So, the act of producing is not always a guarantee of effective media literacy.
If we approach this subject from the other side: “Is media literacy essential for media production by young people?” then we find a sharply contrasting situation. We mentioned it earlier, productions, or what are called productions, increase in number in highly heterogeneous conditions and media literacy is summoned by “the highest authorities” to help in bringing this phenomenon under control. Numerous questions that have remained implicit would be worthy of debate. Can we establish a link between these spontaneous media productions and those that are developed within an educational framework?

The spontaneous production of media by young people, then, is also a fairly long-established practice. Over the years, it has basically taken the form of newspapers, fanzines, radio, and more exceptionally films or videograms. It allowed the expression of political ideas or different cultural practices with a certain creativity and stylistic or linguistic inventions. These new-style media have even supplied a number of the major media with talented professionals. This involved practices that were chosen, well thought-out, and sometimes even militant.

The development of digital technologies has overturned this landscape by automatically making available, to users of computers or mobile telephones, tools that are capable of receiving or editing, and are of more or less professional quality. This is an exceptional opportunity if we consider the possibilities for creation and expression offered in this way and the quality of the resulting exchanges. And in actual fact, a number of individuals of all ages use them in this fashion; however, the vast majority of users of these tools look at them very differently. The technical opportunity most often prevails over the creative potential, and what was an act of production is now rather a push-button reflex.

Observation of weblogs, photos or videos that circulate on social networks often gives the impression of content that is fairly shallow and lacking any excessive involvement on the part of the authors. The act of production seems to be reduced to a minimum and the notion of expression comes back to contents that are very much centred on the individual.

If we were searching for any “citizen-like” expression from these young people, we might be disappointed. Nevertheless, we must consider this great movement of messages of all types in another way. Perhaps we are in the process of assimilating, within these media productions, what is above all—and all the more so for adolescents—an act of communication?

Since 2006, we have been able to observe that young people largely favour all activities involving communication, and in particular with those close to them (peers, family, etc.) These years later, this trend has been reinforced. These activities are likely to adopt all the forms available at a given moment, using all the resources within their reach.

These communications, therefore, often adopt the pretence of appearing like a production or rather a redistribution of a production, by posting this or that image or video. The objective is not so much to produce… as to maintain communication as part of life, to remain in contact. The conversations generated on line by these exchanges, moreover, constitute one of the issues involved in this mechanism.

Media literacy cannot fail to observe these practices amongst young people and the issues that they contain for them. It fuels its action from the moment when someone wishes to act and make progress. We must therefore refrain from any over-hasty disparaging judgement. At the same time, we cannot fail to propose that which makes this project, namely its cultural, creative and “citizen” dimension. For the alarms raised over production bear witness
to the fact that these busy communicators are not very preoccupied with questions of respect for authors, respect for the average individuals whose images they capture and sometimes make look ridiculous, or with thoughts about the effects produced by their exchanges. This dimension is totally absent from their action. They do not think about it.

In this hastily drawn picture, media literacy can and must occupy a strategic position at different levels. First of all, it can introduce a basic form of thinking about the mechanisms at work in these exchanges; the “borrowing” that takes place; or the fundamental question of respect for others in all its forms. It can also encourage production in other forms by broadening the spectrum of media used or by working on their aesthetic and creative dimension. It can introduce the concept of “quality”. It can also lead to a process of thinking about the basics and the contents while relying on amusing play with forms. However, as we have seen, technical skills are most quickly acquired. In short, it can make all these young people into transmitters of real user-generated content by stimulating a broader and more socialising vision of their action, and perhaps even into informed consumers of media-based products.

Through this rapid journey through the relationship between media literacy and media production by young people, we have been able to make a partial assessment of the strong links between them. There is a call for this dimension to reinforce itself under the effects of the universal spread of digital technologies. The need for objectivity is increasing along with the rate of production, and there are important economic, cultural and political issues at stake. It means nothing more and nothing less than giving a generation full possession of its means of expression.

Evelyne Bevort | CLEMI - France
Lifelong media literacy: modelling practices

In today’s society much attention, recommendations and action focus on developing media literacy in our education systems. If the urgency and need for media literacy in a society of media communication is shared by many actors, it will essentially focus on children and youths. Lifelong media literacy is based on the extremely fast development of various media formats and their uses. Media connection has become a major issue of our time. These changes pose new questions and require new skills for our participation as active and responsible citizens.

The media revolution has continued at a steady pace in the last 20 years and media literacy for a linear digital environment in many respects is obsolete. The issue is to bring media literacy towards other audiences, other age-groups and other non-formal educational contexts. The failure of our education systems to ensure that every young citizen has the necessary media skills when leaving school proves the need to take the media literacy project beyond the usual educational framework.

The EuroMeduc project allowed a group of experts to focus on lifelong media literacy at a seminar of experts organised in Brussels in November 2008. It created the possibility to bring together different actors and institutions involved with this media literacy which has to reinvent itself beyond its usual structures and references.
Diversity, citizenship and human rights

One of the seminar of experts’ first tasks was to identify a wide range of actors and practices which exist but do not yet make up the organised networks. The practices of lifelong media literacy are developing to various audiences in the frameworks of structured common references in networks. As soon as they diverge from the framework of formal education media literacy practices involve actors who are extremely different socially: adult literacy, parent movements, support programs for the elderly, social or reintegration help programs, social cohesion initiatives, lifelong education, mental health, health education. Therefore, one of the first features of this media literacy is that it involves and integrates itself into current social and educational practices and concerns the specific issues and audiences. This strong link to social and citizen practices often means that media literacy is interwoven with social and cultural issues. Media literacy is thus seen as an objective as well as a way of reaching others.

For example one can find numerous occasions when elderly people have become competent users of technology: workshops, public cyberspace areas etc, all these practices can help with technical learning. But often learning technical skills is connected to goals of social, relational and societal inclusion.

This can also be the case with media literacy practices aimed at adult literacy: they become involved in learning how to read and write to be connected with the media practices of these audiences (the audiovisual media they use), but also to develop critical skills.

Developing citizens’ active participation is often achieved by implementing practices of media expression for adults. This objective of expressing yourself and social and cultural reality is particularly developed where social cohesion is being addressed for minority populations or in situations of exclusion.

Media literacy is also present in systems aiming to develop cultural diversity or in practices of intercultural development: media literacy is also there for a better understanding of cultural diversity, particularly in quarters and suburbs with migrant populations. It is also linked to human rights and citizenship which organise media literacy practices and projects. In this perspective media literacy is media culture or at the heart of human rights.

Toward a modelling of practices

The exchange of practices has allowed the EuroMeduc project to identify a group of lifelong media literacy models1 based on the diversity of the actors. This attempt at modelling is still a little empirical but nevertheless allows us to draw up boundaries for a new field inside media literacy:

• The ambulance model

Media literacy aims to bring help to those in situations of social distress or exclusion. The development of media literacy practices in this model first of all is a means of social inclusion in situations of exclusion.

1. This modelling has been proposed by the external evaluator of the project Dr. Thierry Desmecht from UCL, at the end of the seminar in Brussels in November 2008.
• The warning model
  Media literacy practices for this model essentially focus on raising awareness campaigns.

• The “Robin Hood” model
  Media literacy is seen from the point of view of fighting for freedom against media dominance. It is a matter of weakening a dominant media system in order to free oneself from the held ideological models.

• The technical skill model
  Media literacy aims to give citizens the technical or technological skills needed to access the media and be a competent user. It is often the favourite model of the media industry.

• The parent/insider educator model
  In this model we focus on the skill of the adult educator. It is matter of making him/her capable of entering into a dialogue with a partner where he/she feels an educational responsibility.

• The “expert parent” model
  In this perspective media literacy aims to lay down rules, to act with authority in its educational task.

• The agora or citizenship model
  The objective here is to give the actors a maximum amount of autonomy in the field of political relations: to allow one to express oneself opinion, to exist and act as a citizen.

• The cultural development model
  Media literacy aims to bring each citizen the means to exist and develop culturally.

Methods and frameworks to create

Many media literacy practices are involved in integrated systems which also pose a problem with identifying the actors themselves. Before identifying themselves as media educators they are social workers, health workers, educators, care workers. The diversity of actors and of the training procedures leads to an absence of shared concepts and methods.

As media literacy was created under associative and strict movements, it very quickly focused its objectives on the educational world as a democratic training area for our society’s citizens. Concepts, methods, but also research were thus essentially developed in the educational field, leaving lifelong media literacy practices to exist without being structured in a network of actors.

This networking of actors and the development of exchanging practices are thus the vital stepping stones for the development of this lifelong media literacy.

Analysing emerging practices in the world of extra-curricular activities shows the diversity of the underlying pedagogical systems. They are often based on concepts taken from the educational world. The field of lifelong media literacy must create its own references regarding controversies and questions inherent to the diversity of practices.

In addition, must lifelong media literacy establish itself in the experimental steps which are finely adapted to particular contexts or must it change its goals and aim for a more assured social efficiency?

How do we structure an intuitive invented (or put together) practice with formed, deliberate educational and pedagogical models?
Finally, how can we develop practices based on an institutional desire, the response to the specific requests of different audiences and the analysis of their needs?

**Strategies and networks**

Since it is part of our everyday life in many aspects (work, citizenship, culture) the media must be the subject of both knowledge and critical distance which can only be obtained through learning. Getting adults to use rational media practices is often only successful via extra-curricular activities (associations, city councils, lifelong training structure). Therefore, the trainers and moderators of these structures must first of all be sensitised and we must give them the tools to use every day in their task of lifelong education.

To develop extra-curricular activities, just as inside structured education systems, media literacy requires a close collaboration between all the actors concerned: teachers, educators, social workers, parents, media industry researchers and producers. Therefore, media literacy today is seen as a continual process which goes beyond institutional frameworks and must create its own networks.

Another crucial issue will be to encourage the creation of educational material and tools for the vast diversity of audiences and institutions which make use of media literacy. Creating tools to share could also lead to a better structure of concepts and methods. It is a matter of leaving individual and often isolated experiences in order to enable a more structurally assured educational project.

Introducing partnerships at local, regional, national and European levels also constitutes a real need for actors in the field, often isolated in their action.

Even if lifelong media literacy should address everyone, it develops to priority audiences or rather in particular structures for action and reflection which address audiences according to their cultural, educational, social or political interests.

It is also necessary to think about the development of media literacy from the “public” media which is produced and published by non-professionals in communication, or rather the media of diversity which aims to establish a forum for intercultural dialogue.

In its concept, lifelong media literacy is at a crossroads of models and methods coming from psychology, pedagogy, communication, sociology, community and intercultural work, etc. Furthermore, the extremely quick development of the media (as much from the point of view of technology as sociology) requires the lifelong adaptation of methods and contexts of this education, just as the development of new practices constantly evolves with its environment. Lifelong media literacy should henceforth grow through new partnerships and coordinated intervention strategies. If it is outside of school that media literacy has succeeded in reacting to the urgency of a media literacy, then henceforth it is again outside of this that it must reinvent itself.

Patrick Verniers | Média Animation asbl
Nowadays everyone would agree to the growing, urgent need to enhance the understanding and the capacity of process analysis within Media Literacy and Media Education, given the increasing influence of the new media upon life styles and behaviours of all citizens, but especially the younger ones.

Indeed, the twin issues of awareness-raising and developing processes to improve media literacy present all Member-States of the European Union, as well as the rest of Europe and the world, with a major challenge.

Somehow, it is less important to recognize the problem of media literacy than to discuss how to foster the development and use of educational tools that would help the young generations, today and in the near future, to better develop a critical and informed attitude regarding the media.

It is precisely with this need in mind that several media professionals, teachers, researchers and other representatives of institutions and organizations from Europe, but also from other regions, decided to share their experiences, practices and especially their reflections at the 3rd EuroMeduc seminar that took place in Faro, Portugal, at the Research Centre for the Arts and Communication —CIAC, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences of the University of the Algarve. This was the latest seminar in a preparatory cycle that led to the final Euromeduc congress. It took place on October 16–18, focusing on the main subject of Media literacy and Media Appropriations by Youth.

There is widespread awareness of the development of a variety of educational processes that may lead to equally diverse degrees of media literacy. This is a major challenge for each of the Member-States of the European Union, as well as for the rest of Europe and
the world. With this in mind, several researchers, mainly from Europe, but also from other regions of the world, debated countless questions and shared their perspectives about how to foster the development and use of educational tools intended to help the young generations, today and in the near future, to better develop a critical and informed attitude regarding the media. We could identify two major approaches of media literacy appropriation by the youngsters: one, more specific to the appropriation of films upon different channels and screening devices, and a second related to a more global perspective of appropriation concerning general aspects of citizenship and information empowerment.

Regarding the perspective specific to film, it is important, on talking about the concept of media literacy, not to forget how fundamental it is “to teach how to use the media”, to analyse, to produce and to disseminate audiovisual media. It follows that media education concerning cinema, or at least film languages, should be supported by three principles: film screenings, film analysis and film basic production.

First of all, concerning film screenings, it is necessary for the students to acquire basic knowledge of some reference works or genres, in order to understand the narrative process of any sequence of images. On the other hand, film analysis would provide an opportunity to make a global reading and understanding of the films, the moving images, or of selected sequences. In this context, several elements would be clarified which would allow the interpretation of diverse codes inherent to the cinematographic language, thus making it possible to understand and interpret the various aesthetical and technical elements that may characterize, select and organize the continuing flow of moving images.

Further on in the appropriation process, as regards the elements of basic film production it is essential that the students are able to think along with images and sounds, in order to produce them through their own codes and through their own languages with the same proficiency as required by the patterns of eloquent discourse within any other media.

Finally, it is necessary that students gain a global vision of the modern ways and possibilities of cinematographic distribution and dissemination, namely through the internet.

In addition to affording a method to learn the key elements of cinematographic environments, this knowledge also provides a way to motivate the students and to secure better pedagogical results, as demonstrated by many practical experiments in various regions and countries.

Our daily experience shows that the world we live in offers numerous ways to support film devices in the scope of new media. This matters more for setting a new relationship between the users and these resources than for the specific mediat performance they were originally designed for. As a consequence, it is very important to draw a line between the playful environments, as a main characteristic of the digital space-cyberspace, and their ludic dimensions that would generally entail some dispersion and conflicts. In more specific terms, the latter might also offer mechanisms of identity affirmation and cultural belonging to groups and communities, probably virtual ones, though endowed with their own kind of structure.

In light of the above, and as regards the use of the new media, namely within the many forms of film languages, it is important to see them as a possible way to foster a desire to see and to analyze other message contents, of a different cultural, ethical and aesthetical nature to the most predominant ones. This might lay the groundwork for a new culture of responsibility to be possibly adopted by young audiences, but also by the producers who see them as their target group, whether it is good or bad.
In conclusion, according to this more specific perspective of the appropriation process, Media Education is a very important tool that will allow the production of more personal, more playful media messages than those of film, while nurturing the development of new skills and abilities concerning this powerful medium.

If we take a more global perspective, a leading aspect worth considering is the separation, sometimes almost a divide, between the concepts of “information literacy” and “media literacy”. After all, although these concepts are inclusive and complementary, there is still a need for differentiation between both conceptual approaches. Actually they have been framed differently in various proposals. Along these lines, Unesco, one of the organizations with an active role on information literacy, has been developing some practical initiatives concerning the fields of teacher training, basic and secondary education and lifelong learning. They have also established guidelines and policies to promote local initiatives as well as global frameworks and curriculum development, all intended to include information literacy within those issues. This local and global approach builds upon the assumption that, nowadays, the educational paradigm has shifted due to information storage not being an educational challenge any longer. Instead, it supports the need to learn and to process that same information, which is stored through the old and the new media every day within each educational process, formal and informal. The main aspect to be concerned with is the fact that those educational processes need to be rerouted towards knowledge and information handling instead of data storage.

Moreover, with the fast growth and the subsequent convergence of the traditional means of communication and new technologies, general media education methods have necessarily to apply to all media forms and supports, irrespective of their nature and of the technologies that may be used. This calls for a new kind of media literacy, namely regarding the local and global ways of appropriation of the internet. It entails the need to develop a strategy to bring together, at least for this purpose, rich and poor countries and their populations all over the world.

Besides these main ideas about the differentiation between information and media literacy, there was a common idea, shared by almost all the experts and reflecting a desire to collapse the concepts of information literacy and media literacy into just one single approach. Ideally, the main goals supposedly pursued by both processes would merge too. As a result, the limitations of all determinist communication or information paradigms would be overcome, a more cultural vision of the media, media education, media literacy processes would emerge. If the cultural dimension of this vision of the media, media education and media literacy processes is to be enhanced, nothing is more important than the access and the critical usage of the new media, in order to understand all of their dimensions, whether related to specific contents or to their functional aspects, like social networking, for example.

The use of new media helps us realize that some traditional splits have become really obsolete. For example, games and other virtual environments, as well as modern society in general, make the line drawn between Arts and Sciences look terribly “old-fashioned”.

This is due to the artistic and technological skills required for the production of games and other new media environments: they embrace both high technical skills and complex aesthetic notions. Within the new media there is a transformation of the artistic and literary tradition, as we know it from the traditional canons, into something with a more fragmentary
structure and mosaic-like texture. Still, nowadays, we witness how media narratives are undervalued, as a result of being displaced by an excessive preoccupation with the new technological aspects only.

Those paradigmatic changes all point to a clear necessity to tap the educational values of “gaming” and “networking” in this era of new media (again the distinction between learning through media, or about media, or with media was highlighted). A model has yet to be developed along the lines of the 3 C’s of Media Literacy: cultural, critical and creative.

To achieve these goals we must stay the course of our different approaches to the main subjects. However, those approaches will have to promote top down and bottom up processes equally if they are going to succeed. Indeed full consideration should be given to cultural differences. As a matter of fact, Europe has developed a culture based on a large amount of ethnocentricity and needs to value other approaches more. In this context, the Unesco recommendations may help take a more global perspective likely to assist in coping with a variety of educational, cultural, social and political agendas, through a process of cross-fertilization and mutual pollination. Today, more money is being spent on research aimed to provide a global perspective on the subject of Media Literacy. This is in itself a positive trend, but still we need to reflect and to discuss more about these problems: Would it be possible to find a global approach? The answer is probably no. Different cultural environments and their languages inform different ways of thinking and different ways of interpreting the world around us and therefore different ways to use and analyze the media. Moreover, we need also to consider that different youngsters, with distinct social and cultural backgrounds, have a different relationship with media.

We also need to realize that technology is not a big monster and that it isn’t aimed just for young people. In fact, media literacy is more and more needed among the older generations. The empowerment that technology skills may offer can be a big opportunity to all of us. We all agree that technologies are what we want them to be, and their use provides us with tools to face the new “dangers” — risks and opportunities of the world. But we need to understand them in order to use them properly.

However, with the fast development of social software and digital media, it becomes really easy to produce messages and publish them in the public space. The audiences become authors and consumers become producers, assuming everything goes well. This means that the traditional paradigm of Media Education — Media Literacy is now not enough, because it educates mainly readers and nowadays the target constituency has expanded to include authors as well. We need to train them to be responsible authors, requiring them to develop the same sense of responsibility that has been requested from television channels so far. Now, our students must become also responsible for the production of their contents and not only for their study: we must make them able to know what and how to publish in the public sphere not to breach other people’s rights — a responsible citizenship paradigm.

So, from a global perspective on Media Literacy, we may well see the need for a double shift: a shift from a determinist paradigm to a cultural one — media aren’t devices, they are cultures — and it is not enough just to introduce them for having changes made, it is necessary to study their culture, their main contents and forms; another shift from the critical thinking paradigm to a new paradigm that may be more concerned with active citizenship of the youths.
In short, we may conclude that the leading aims regarding the issues of Media Literacy and Internet Appropriations by the youth are:

- To bridge the gaps, through documenting the relations between the institutions’ and peoples’ practices both in school and in real life interaction with media;
- To develop new methodologies: educational methodologies and research methodologies based on cooperation, dialogue, creativity, as well as cross-cultural understanding and the capacity to observe the problems from an ethnographical point of view, considering their civic and generational active perspectives and experimentation possibilities;
- And finally, to discuss themes that may contribute to develop solutions within the main frame of different representations, appropriations, values, diversity and cultural identity.

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As a conclusion to the Bellaria Congress, the participants were invited to take part in a meeting organised into linguistic groups and to work together on the recommendations. These recommendations were drawn up in five languages (French, English, German, Spanish and Portuguese) and are built upon three precepts: opportunities, brakes and actions to be taken.

Each group was tasked with synthesizing the media literacy challenges discussed during the four-day congress. On taking up these challenges, the participants intended to bring all key stakeholders in media literacy into the debate and to allow them to reflect upon the recommendations they wished to communicate to the European institutions as well as to other target audiences: educators, researchers and the media industries. Over 70 recommendations have been drawn up by the various groups. The summary of this work, presented below, was made accessible to the public during a press conference held on 15 December in Brussels.

Opportunities

The opportunities have been defined with the perspective of media literacy acting as a lever to help people develop a critical mind, whether or not media-related, towards society. They are defined at various geographical levels (regional vs. international), temporal levels (duration vs. instantaneity) or social levels (individual vs. community).

Researchers

The experts believe that media literacy
- enables the main principle to be reaffirmed by allowing the interplay of other issues and a meta-disciplinary approach;
- enables the assessment of actions;
allows the lifelong learning principle to be reaffirmed;
enables the sharing of practices between researchers, practitioners, the industry, regulators and political leaders;
fosters positive prospects in terms of internationalisation (geographic, cultural and educational) and intercultural dialogue;
offers an open forum to the various key-participants (schools, university, industries, etc.);

**Teachers - Educators**
The experts believe that media literacy
- helps bridge cultural gaps that exist between popular youth culture and traditional education;
- provides numerous resources;
- allows new materials and methodologies to be developed;
- allows good practices to be conducted that may elicit a wider participation (education, culture, youth sector workers);
- fosters the participation and sharing of content and personal experiences (e-participation, social networks, etc.).

**Political leaders**
The experts believe that media literacy
- promotes tolerance, acceptance and the inclusion of other people via the exchange of visual images that goes beyond geographic and linguistic boundaries and brings an intercultural dimension into play;
- allows actions to be put in place, when the anticipated challenges and skills are articulated explicitly.
- provides a common basis at a European, national and local level;
- should provide member states with a template for developing a national strategy for implementing educational objectives;
- allows for digital access to be integrated into information society concepts;
- allows for the emergence of a political awareness with respect to media literacy at a European level;
- has allowed for international networks to be put in place, which in turn improves their activities;
- reaffirms the intergenerational aspect across all audiences (children, the elderly).

**The media industries**
The experts believe that media literacy
- Enables partnership management and public/private mediation.
**Brakes**

While working on the restrictions, the participants defined the obstacles that are sometimes or often met on conducting media literacy actions.

**Researchers**

The experts believe that media literacy

- leads to confusion as regards the terminology used with respect to the following examples: “information literacy”, “e-learning”, digital education and “media literacy” and media literacy education;
- encounters problems in reconciling the various media literacy approaches that are set by the various inherent paradigms, on one hand, with the “Quick Fix” requirements emanating from research sponsors on the other hand;
- shows a disconnect between theory and practice;
- may be restricted in its qualitative assessment by the prevalence of the quantitative aspect of the “information literacy” and “digital skills” concepts.
- demonstrates that there is a lack of public research in certain areas as well as a divide running between researchers working in the media sector and those working in the media literacy field;
- is confronted with an inaccurate correlation between the concepts of “media access” and “media capacity utilisation”.

**Teachers - Educators**

The experts believe that media literacy

- is problematic in terms of comparing different cultures and educational systems;
- demonstrates constraints associated with the school environment: a time-limited programme, a lack of teacher training and no sustainable evaluation framework;
- encourages the standardisation of content and practices;
- is often considered as a project organised outside of the usual school framework, whereas it should be an integral part of the curriculum;
- encounters problems in terms of encouraging teachers to give media documents the same consideration they do to approved school documents.

**Political leaders**

The experts believe that media literacy

- can be influenced by political and commercial interests rather than educational needs;
- demonstrates a lack of interaction between the various media literacy models and the development levels throughout Europe;
- is centred on general policies rather than on facts and on users;
- suffers from ambiguity as regards the shared challenges and vision of the various partners;
- highlights the gap that exists between the European, national and independent policies relating to media literacy and to daily social and academic practices;
- demonstrates that certain people are excluded from the 21st century due to digital “violation”;
- is not integrated into educational reflections in all European countries;
appears primarily to be a national priority, which makes it difficult to reach a consensus between European countries.

**The media industry**
The experts believe that media literacy

- demonstrates that there is a lack of consultation, cooperation and dialogue fora able to bring the various participants together (public authorities, associations, industries);
- demonstrates the need to include economic perspectives in the recommendations that could be made to the industry;
- is led by technological advancements, which is often to the detriment of the critical mind.

**Actions to be taken**
The actions to be taken have been defined in order to sustain, as well as improve the perception, policies and media literacy actions that are conducted in Europe.

**Researchers**
The experts believe that media literacy

- should enable the applied research of various disciplines to be undertaken with a view to life-long learning;
- must be defined in terms of a European lexicon;
- should foster the development of comprehensive quantitative and qualitative tools aimed to assess effectiveness;
- should support research and practice exchange programmes by means of a general dynamic such as, for example, intercultural education.

**Teachers - Educators**
The experts believe that media literacy

- should favour the promotion of the aesthetic and creative dimensions of its activities;
- should help teachers to reaffirm and support the training challenge and in particular to encourage blended learning solutions;
- should facilitate the development of local-scale models and make the beneficiaries and responsibilities to be shared between the participants clear;
- should be developed both in a formal and informal context;
- should encourage teachers and educators to seek training in this area both in terms of the initial course and on a continuous basis;

**Political leaders**
The experts

- encourage the creation and funding of an organisation that critically maps out and evaluates the media literacy actions conducted, translating and disseminating them into a common language in the form of European models, practices, research and resources

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1. The Spanish linguistic group expressed the desire to create a national body (Spanish National Council on Media Education and Media regulation).
• wish to develop models that exemplify the way in which media literacy can be integrated into mandatory and lifelong learning programmes as the ninth key competence;
• wish to organise networking between those who work in the field, in order to share the wealth of their resources;
• wish to support and enrich intergenerational venues that promote media practice and expression;
• wish to reaffirm the fundamental challenge of media literacy which relates to the participation of citizens and social actors in the democratic debate and critical thinking.
• wish to add an organisational rationale to the rationale of a network of participants geared towards action and a strategic approach at European level.
• encourage a multi-ministerial approach.

The media industry
The experts
• wish to promote dialogue between the media industries, the regulatory bodies, the political decision-makers and educators at a local, national and European level. They encourage the various participants to develop tools and partnerships based on good practices that have already been exemplified by industry support actions in respect of educational actions;
• wish media literacy to be integrated into media professional training courses;
• wish the media industry to be reminded of its duty to raise awareness by means of campaigns.

Conclusion
As a conclusion, and following careful perusing of the outcome of this collaborative work, we have to admit that the scene is set for further debate, but also for seeking solutions and tools along the following topics: terminology, interculturalism, emergence of new technologies and partnerships. As far as terminology is concerned, we observe that beyond language considerations the various definitions of media literacy fail to converge into a global definition. Yet, we have heard most stakeholders attending the Bellaria Congress say they wish to see a homogeneous “grammar” to prevail in this area. The intercultural dimension has been brought to the fore either as an asset of media literacy or as a curb to it. Most experts seemingly wish to see this dimension emphasized, thanks to additional research but also to relevant policies and actions. The emergence and usage of new technologies have been addressed as well. Indeed, whereas they take mainly the form of innovation, they raise questions as to the definition of educational goals worth pursuing. Finally, a great deal of recommendations focused on partnerships and on how diverse the partners and their role should be. Partnerships inevitably raise the issue of the education, whether early or continuing, of the partners concerned.

Summarized by | Catherine Geeroms, Média Animation asbl
In my position as external assessor for the EuroMeduc project, I will in this text present the principal elements of my final evaluation of the project, based not only on the running of the Bellaria conference, but also on the three preparatory seminars, in Paris, Brussels and Faro. This evaluation consists of 12 parts, devoted to the various dimensions of this ambitious project.

**Organisation of work**

Logistically-sound organisation, well-adapted reception and infrastructure

As with the three preparatory seminars, the organisers of the conference showed excellent skills in terms of the planning, organisation and providing the environment for the work.

This final conference mobilised significant resources, exceptional in the world of education

Thanks to the resources provided through financing by the European Commission, the organisers were able to conceive, under professional working conditions - which are often not fully achievable in the sectors of education, research and continuing education - a series of meetings and discussions in a suitable environment that was necessary in view of the scope of the project. These resources, managed with consistency and professionalism, led to a high-quality approach, which, due to the methodology used, was groundbreaking in the field of media literacy. Compared to the previous European initiative, set up by the founding conference in Belfast in 2004, which was already of high quality, it has been possible to achieve a leap forward in the quality of the three principal fields involved in managing the initiative:
Preparation, detailed, well distributed amongst those responsible for tasks, with a care to working towards the project’s priority objectives.

The implementation by the various managers of tasks from coordination to logistics,

Plus, during the meeting, the contribution and investment on the part of those present, each of whom functioned as both purveyor and beneficiary, in accordance with an innovative mechanism for cooperation, the effectiveness of which is evidenced by the final recommendations.

The procedure and the results would certainly not have been able to achieve the quality they did without such a mobilisation of financial, intellectual and technical resources.

Although the majority of the participants were already familiar with the culture of international meetings, the diversity of their profiles (see below) demanded a comfortable and effective setting for their work. Since these conditions were fulfilled, it was possible to achieve the results.

This personal judgement was confirmed by quite a number of declarations made to me by certain participants, either during the work or subsequently by letter.

(“A big thank-you for this fascinating conference. I didn’t notice the time going by, never had the slightest feeling that I wanted to be anywhere else than there with you and all those eminent specialists. If you knew how good it is sometimes, this shared thinking… […] I returned home a different person: I know more than ever that where I am now, I am working on media literacy. Not bad, is it, to come back from a conference with a better idea of who you are?” email from a participant, 27 October 2009)

However, three minor gaps were pointed out by some participants:

• A few isolated changes in the series of activities, due to restrictions on the availability of speakers or adjustments to the proceedings,

• A certain lack of announcements about the successive phases at times when many participants were dispersed throughout the various workshops,

• Too little time for informal contacts, in a packed work programme, while many participants were extremely interested in engaging with foreign colleagues whom they had never met.

Under such circumstances, it would be beneficial to develop official sessions for reciprocal contacts (“speed-dating sessions?”)

Relevance of the subject: overwhelmingly confirmed

“Implementing media literacy, from school up to the structures for lifelong learning” proved to be a highly relevant subject. One could identify, as has been the case throughout the work, the development of “media literacy” in agendas, from local to global, obviously passing through European level, but there is no need for a conference to establish this. On the other hand, if we analyse the list of themes in the conference programme and the diversity of the speakers, it becomes clear that media literacy is not just a trendy phenomenon; on the contrary it is an in-depth movement that unites a great diversity of contributors around a set of common problems: how to accomplish, in a world of high-density media, the cultural revolution that will give each citizen, whatever his or her condition, a sufficient level of intellectual, social and technical skills to develop within this historic new context and make an active contribution to the development
of the media system, by using it and making choices while being conscious of the issues involved. This vision of a risk that is to be taken, not through enlightened despotism, but through a participative democratic process developed by the users themselves, found its beginnings in terms of achievement and institutionalisation during the four Euroméduc meetings.

A global approach and a reappraisal of media literacy in Europe

This approach, both global and specialised in multiple real-life sectors is confirmed if we examine the following indicators:

- The presence of a wide variety of participants, Europe-wide cover, diversity of positions of those involved (practitioners, managers, researchers)
- Number and variety of themes tackled
- Multiplicity of fields of reference
- Mobilisation of many different players in each European country
- Originality of innovative and consistent recommendations

This theme of a global approach is the most ambitious of the whole Euroméduc project, but a previous conference (in Belfast) and three seminars (Euroméduc, in Paris, Brussels and Faro) have already prepared for this way of thinking, which at present has reached a certain level of maturity, but is not yet self-sufficient.

Let’s list some of the dimensions of these indicators:

Highly diverse geographical origins of participants

The registration dossiers show the following countries of origin: Germany, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the United Kingdom, Russia, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Turkey, Ukraine, USA.

That makes a minimum of 30 countries, both within and outside Europe.

Diversified fields of activity of participants

In the participants’ profiles we can see: students, administrators, researchers, designers, creative personnel, editors, educators, teachers, industrialists, engineers, producers, regulators, policy-makers, and technicians.

That makes a minimum of 15 fields.

Multidisciplinary nature of participants’ scientific fields

The participants belong to the following scientific field: cultural affairs, anthropology, the arts, audiovisuals, chemistry, accounting, law, economics, ethics, geography, management, history, information and communication, computing, engineering, games, linguistics, literature, mathematics, multimedia, pedagogy, philosophy, physics, psychoanalysis, psychology, cognitive sciences, political sciences, sociology, theology, etc…

That makes a minimum of 32 disciplines involving knowledge.

As a consequence, we may today more satisfactorily measure the real diversity of those involved in media literacy. However, the 300 participants at the final conference, representative as they may be, are probably the forerunners of a new profile of educator (initial and continuous) whose numbers and level of integration into all the European educational mechanisms still fall far short of reaching a sufficient scale for it to be considered that access
The whole European population is guaranteed a level of media literacy necessary for their individual and social development. At the most, we may say that today an initial configuration is in place in Europe.

The EuroMeduc project has succeeded in giving media literacy in Europe a new dimension: a desire to analyse the European approach to media literacy, while seeking to establish the features of its singular nature, by looking at it in comparison with the approaches adopted by other regional or national organisations elsewhere in the world, subject to the same techno/media-based globalisation, but with different traditions, histories and socio-economic environments.

This construction of a European vision has been organised around a corpus of unifying themes, the exploration and discussion of which in specialised workshops constitute the framework.

**The themes of the work were well structured:**

- **What are the skills involved in media literacy,**
  - How do we define and assess them?
  - Question on their development. Do they have a central trunk; are they in a state of breakdown, for example under the pressure of new skills known as “digital” or even “information”?
- **The dynamic process of the controversies that have marked media literacy since its origin in the 70s.**
- **The transformation of media environments**
- **Research activity**
  - This work theme is new to the list and is extremely welcome. Although media literacy has a longstanding history in pioneering educational practices, research into media literacy and its teaching today require massive investment on the part of research laboratories, as there are still so many unknowns in this field.
- **Media, literacy and culture**
- **External and autonomous regulations**
  - This theme is also crucial, insofar as education is bound to be complementary to the system’s other regulations. This in particular affects the conceptual pairing of “education–protection”.
- **Educational practices in different environments**
- **Visions of the future: the issues, challenges, dangers, risks and opportunities**

**Report concerning the content of the Euroméduc project**

**Media literacy is more than ever an expanding movement**

Arising in historical terms from practices on the ground, directed towards young people, media literacy has built itself up by broadening its ambitions and fields of operations.

It has opened itself up to new media-based systems, especially under the impact of the development of structures for production and distribution, but also with the growth in interactive audio-scripto-visual techniques.

It has aimed itself at new beneficiaries: adults, excluded persons, and those within the profession, who did not always consider the issues involved in their activities.
It has incorporated new media-based practices, and also new pedagogic approaches, linked to teaching contexts that go way beyond the school framework.

Today, it is connected to the new challenges of contemporary history: exclusion, economic and social development, the climate and the environment of natural species, multicultural and global citizenship, relations between the generations and cultural development.

The dynamics of the work carried out during the conference and the preparatory seminars

The coordination of the various phases of the shared work was concentrated and sustained. Let’s highlight some of the major aspects.

The contributions in terms of material were highly diversified, following one another very closely, sometimes chaotically, and highly dependent on the techniques used by the coordinators, since all the contributors came from different backgrounds with many different traditions.

The conference saw the implementation of new techniques for shared work, where the collective dynamic was exploited more systematically than in traditional conferences, more marked by a powerful duality of “active presenters/passive audience”.

These new techniques demanded intensity, flexibility and mental agility from the participants, who also came from very diverse backgrounds. They showed themselves capable of subjecting themselves to collective learning, faced with the multiple opportunities that arose during the interactions, exchanges and discussions.

This heavy collective workload is leading to EuroMeduc itself becoming not just a process of thinking and discussion but a veritable social network of professionals, combining intellectual and relational activities, while constructing a social environment that constitutes a community, in the best sense of the term.

Nevertheless, it still remains to secure and extend this new community by modern means of exchange and distribution of publications and debates.

A systematic education strategy

This conference brought about a new collective (international, inter-sector and interdisciplinary) way of looking at the improvement of media literacy in Europe. This strategy is attempting to coordinate different complementary dimensions placed at the service of formal and informal education. We may represent this by the diagram below.

- Here, the Citizen - media relationship is seen as posing a problem: that of incomplete literacy, where the development of the media has not been sufficiently accompanied by the development of cognitive, social and technical skills that the intensity of transformations in the media makes necessary. Simple daily use of the media is not sufficient to develop the necessary skills within the population.

- In the face of this gap, EuroMeduc considers the educational approach to be the first lever of an effective initiative, with regulation as a complement to the limited and not always desirable effects, since they threaten the liberty and diversity of the players involved.

- It is for this assessment to measure the effectiveness of the educational mechanisms that have been implemented for the benefit of these populations; it is expected that their effects will bring about a favourable modification to the relationship between citizens and the media that was initially identified as problematic.
Efficiency of result: Recommendations

The recommendations seem to have properly benefited from the work Analysis of the recommendations leads us to consider that they form part of the logical prolongation of the themes and the work, and even that they accurately reflect not only the subjects but also the importance the consensus of 300 participants has implicitly manifested and which is transformed into explicit material in the text of the recommendations. They do not burst out in discontinuity during the debates and do not lead us to suspect the action of a lobby in their compilation. As a consequence, they are elements drawn up through the expertise of the participants, and compared during democratic and creative interactions.

They nevertheless present new forms:

These are more like “projects to undertake together” than demands for services addressed to a third-party authority. To this extent, the recommendations are programmatic and worthy of consideration, after analysis and interpretation, as a work programme, capable of driving the European decisions and actions of tomorrow.
Efficiency of results: What at present are the achievements that had not reached this level of accomplishment before the Euromédúc project?

The first meeting having been prepared for by such a process of integration of problems and practices, Euromédúc laid down the solid foundations for an integrated European development of media literacy, characterised by two major advances: the effective creation of a network of important players and a “hypertext” of shared references, considered as relevant with regard to both thinking and action.

The creation of a network was achieved

- A social network of members is currently in place: it includes those present (or virtually present) at Bellaria, as well as all those colleagues likely to keep up with and collaborate with this new network. The most poorly represented link remains the industrial sector, including, with a few notable exceptions, such as the games industry, certain television programmes and newspapers.
- An institutional and technical mechanism for exchanges is also in place.
- A culture of dialogue has been instituted, based on shared questioning, rationality and respect for the points of view of others.
- A culture of research led on a multilateral basis by users, researchers and decision-makers.

A standardised world, partially-shared, following a democratic model

This standardised world is characterised by the following elements:

- A new dynamic collaborative hypertext has been opened, as evidenced by the final report. It is worthy of note that this set of data, questions and recommendations does not necessarily constitute a doctrine, but rather a corpus that awaits further development.
- A vision of the media and the issues involved, centred in an innovative way, not on the producers of techniques or content or on the broadcasters of programmes, but on the users, defined not as anonymous and passive targets, to be influenced or protected, but on the contrary as active agent-citizens who have the right and the need to consider their future together within a new system of social connection through the media, with a profound impact on the life of society in general.
- This shared vision is built around a minimum basic hub of concepts and socially negotiated intellectual frameworks.
- This vision of media literacy in the future is at present clearer, and better shared, but it remains critical, if not mistrustful, of its own naivety or towards tendencies to simplify complex questions, as was notably highlighted on several occasions with regard to “digital literacy”.
- A shared desire for structural development in the school, the family, in industry and in community and public spaces.

Efficiency of results: The action – research pair

Many practical orientations are just so many questions of research. Of the four meetings involved in this project, Bellaria is the one that, in my opinion, was most successful in specifying the “unknown” elements of the contemporary development of the media system.

In particular, this involves the state of uncertainty relating to future scenarios, concerning the profound nature of the transformation of civilisation due to media networks:

- Towards an average and standardised global culture?
• A new political mediation regarding diversity (dominating or negotiating)?
• Or a mosaic of egocentric microcosms, at best indifferent, or, at worst, at war?

The hypothesis given here is that the response to this question will of necessity come from the way in which European citizens, within a favourable educational context, build the skills to control this risky process.

**Efficiency of results: a necessary continuity**

EuroMeduc has thus produced some incontestable results, but these must at present win on a permanent basis by being structurally supported in a “three-dimensional” way:

• Increasing institutional permanence by creating a permanent and progressive basic structure, at European level.
• Continuing with confrontation and thinking between the various players-experts in subsequent meetings on the theme of the major questions of media literacy and how to improve it amongst the European population.
• Giving local players the opportunity to engage in the broad dialogue that has been opened, so that they might better perceive their own innovative nature in a wider and international context, in order to ensure their visibility and reinforce their complementary position in their specific sector.

It would be favourable to the social development of media literacy to grant it a permanent status that would allow it to continue the work undertaken following a method that would prove its effectiveness in the hands of the people and institutions that invented and implemented it.

**Returning to the project’s objectives**

By way of a reminder, the initial objective of the Euromédic project were as follows:

• To put in place a structured mechanism for the exchange and distribution of results in the field of media literacy. It brings together, in a transverse way, diverse players in this field: researchers, experts, education managers, representatives of associations, and practitioners and specialists in media literacy, from Europe and beyond. The project is run within a close relationship with the existing European network: EUROMEDIALITERACY.
• To feed existing networks by allowing the circulation and evaluation of results obtained by research programmes, good practices and by the tools that have been developed.
• To provide access to mechanisms for exchange, to players who do not have structural frameworks for this purpose (particular attention will be paid to small educational structures developing expertise on the ground). This favours improved European integration of these structures and makes it possible to benefit from their specific potential for innovation.
• To initiate and develop, amongst all the players concerned, practices for exchange and cooperation that are more intensive, structured and transversal; to allow them to enter into a dialogue more effectively and to construct a media literacy policy that is closest to their requirements and specific constraints.
• To identify the restrictions and opportunities, and the actions to be undertaken, and from there, to produce recommendations with an educational, scientific and political impact.
• To ensure the optimum distribution of the results of this project by the cooperative transversal publication (both on and off line) of the results of research and best practices.
Finally, the objectives of the project seem overall to have been achieved: the project has succeeded in producing results that attain or even exceed the initial intentions, where points one and four are concerned.

An important work has just been accomplished. As Wladimir Vai (Unesco) said in his speech: “YOU HAVE ACHIEVED A GREAT STEP FORWARD”.

Certain indicators show a contrasting future. Media literacy is undergoing positive development, but new issues are (re)appearing, obliging us to pay close attention to the consistency of our shared project, a risky adventure: that of civilisation.

**On a personal note**

I would like to thank everyone for the critical confidence that I have observed towards myself and my judgement as an assessor.

I would also like to extend my congratulations to:

- The organisers Zaffiria, CLEMI (Centre for Liaison between Teaching and the Information Media), the University of the Algarve and Média Animation and their helpers (Evens, ISFE, Pegi, Médiacoach, ENPA, EC lifelong learning programme)
- The European Commission, which agreed and financed this ambitious project
- The administrative, technical and logistical directors of this project
- And the experts and speakers, for their formidable capacity for thinking and acting together.

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Andrew Burn  Professor of Media Education at the Institute of Education. He teaches on the MA in Media, Culture & Communication, supervises research students, and works on funded research projects in the field of media and young people. He is assistant director of the Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media. He has published work on many aspects of the media, including media literacy in schools, the semiotics of the moving image and computer games, and young people’s production of digital animation, film and computer games. He is interested in the adaptation of theories of multimodality to describe and analyse media texts, and in how such theories relate to the Cultural Studies research tradition.

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**Ida Poettinger**  PhD, she was an editor for a professional media educational journal and website. She managed projects for the Ministry of Education and the Arts of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany and participated in the European partnership EMECE. Since December 2008 she works at JFF — Institute for Media Research and Media Education.
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 Média Animation  
www.media-animation.be  
Média Animation asbl is a media education resource centre and a lifelong learning centre for adults. It is recognised and subsidised by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the French-speaking Community in Belgium. The association has the vocation to develop responsible citizenship by cultivating the citizen’s critical faculty towards a mass communication society. Our association aims to actively support associative, social, educative or cultural institutions, projects and initiatives by implementing communication-related professional actions and services for citizen projects on developing critical command over communication tools and methods. Média Animation initiates and collaborates in several European projects. The association mainly targets adults, teachers, moderators, educators, social and cultural workers. It organises the required services and means necessary for realising its objective, in all the media, particularly through actions such as: research, information, sensitisation, training, publication and audio-script-visual and multimedia products.

CLEMI  
www.clemi.org  
The CLEMI (Centre de Liaison de l’Enseignement et des Médias d’Information - centre for the liaison between teaching and news media) is a media education centre funded by the National Ministry of Education. It was created in 1983 as a department associated with the Centre national de documentation pédagogique (National Centre for Pedagogical documentation). Coordinating a network of 30 local teams, the national CLEMI team consists of 20 persons. Its expertise relies on its already existing close relationship with the European
Media Network, of which it is a founding member; on its knowledge of not only the French but also the European education systems and its capacity to conduct projects incorporating School partner structures (parent associations, educational associations, pedagogical movements); its competencies in training, research projects and production of pedagogical tools concerning media education; and finally, its knowledge of the media produced by young people (in and outside school, curricular and extra-curricular activities) formalised by the Bibliothèque nationale de France (National french library) as part of an associated pole convention.

Zaffiria
www.zaffiria.it
Zaffiria is a local public centre that came into being thanks to the collaboration of five municipalities (Bellaria Igea Marina, Santarcangelo, Verucchio, Poggio Berni, Torriana), and the province of Rimini. The centre is responsible for media literacy workshops in schools, from pre-school to secondary school, as well as training for parents and teachers. At the national level, Zaffiria organises the Italian conference on media education (Medi@tando) every two years in Bellaria Igea Marina (three publications) as well as seminars for experts and politicians. At the European level, Zaffiria has worked as a partner on two projects: Media Educ and Log In The Media and has collaborated on two other projects: Iperfigurine and Glocal Youth.

The University of the Algarve
www.ualg.pt
The University of the Algarve was created in 1979. A few years later, it merged with the Faro Polytechnic. It consists of five faculties and four schools. The number of students has reached up to 10,000; there are 650 teachers as well as 455 non-teaching staff. The main areas of teaching and research are: Human and Social Sciences, Humanities, Heritage, Management, Tourism, Marine Sciences, Environment, Natural Sciences, Engineering, Technology, and Education. The University of the Algarve participates—and has participated—in numerous transnational projects and partnerships aimed at teachers, research studies at both the European and global levels.
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**CLEMI:** Evelyne Bevort and Gérard Colavecchio

**Zaffiria:** Alessandra Falconi, Silvia Mendes and Beatrice Manni

**UALG:** Gabriela Borges, Vítor Reia-Baptista and Mirian Tavares

Thanks to our experts

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The three preparatory EuroMeduc seminars and the European Congress which took place in Bellaria (Italy) from 21st to 24th October 2009, emphasised the wealth, diversity and vitality of media literacy in Europe. They also enabled hundreds of researchers and practitioners to network, while bringing together the media industry and policy-makers. Thanks to contributions from a large panel of experts, the present published piece provides an account of this work, and the recommendations they have come up with. Approaches, at times dissimilar, yet always complementary, were uncovered, emphasising the need for this issue to be adapted continuously to the rapid evolution within the media and within societies.

Prefaced by Viviane Reding — European Commissioner for Information, Society and Media.

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