

THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Foreword

Marc Scheuer
Director
UN-Alliance of Civilizations
www.unaoc.org

Educators around the world have been championing media education and media literacy for well over two decades, but in most countries policy-makers shaping national education programmes have just recently become aware of the need for media literacy. With this publication the Alliance of Civilizations –in partnership with UNESCO, Grupo Comunicar, and all the contributors– would like to infuse dynamism to the process of normalization which aims to include media education and media literacy in educational curricula across the world.

This foreword is not the occasion for an in-depth narrative explaining the reasons why we think that this is important, necessary and urgent. For well developed answers to these questions, I invite the reader to consult the articles presented –with a global perspective– in this publication. I will simply advance the thought that, in the context of our media saturated societies, media literacy is an indispensable tool for the development of critical thinking skills among young people and across society at large. Some go so far as to link media education and media literacy with the all-encompassing Universal Human Right to education. In the often challenging, confusing and contradictory media environment in which competing political, economic and ideological interests convene and collide, citizens of all ages need new tools that facilitate and ensure their well being as well as their active civic participation.

A truly democratic political system depends on the active participation of its citizens. Active and –most importantly– informed citizens. Media literacy is one of the principal new tools that provide citizens with the skills they need to make sense of the sometimes overwhelming flow of daily media and in particular, new media and

information disseminated through new communication technologies. These forces are reshaping traditional values while transforming them into contemporary new ways of understanding life, society, and culture.

We agree with those who argue that the capacity to provide symbolic resources and tools to make sense of the complexities of everyday life is an essential dimension of media, given that the institutionalized media are key generators that circulate symbols in social life. In today's world, citizens, individuals of all ages and genres, need to develop analytical skills that allow for better intellectual and emotional understanding of the symbolic world produced by new media. Without basic «traditional literacy» (reading, writing and numeracy) a person will often find unsurpassable predicaments that will prevent him or her from genuinely participating in social development and civic engagement in our societies. With the arrival of new electronic media, this basic education must now include new skills, new pedagogical approaches: media literacy.

From this perspective, media literacy emerges not as an option, but as a necessity. It is a basic stepping stone that enables a human being to fully function, as a discerning citizen, in today's world. It is indeed urgent and necessary for policy-makers across the world to be aware of this new paradigm, and of new challenges that are emerging from our information society. While it is true that, today, only about one sixth of humanity has access to the internet, the speed with which new electronic technologies (mobile telephony, wireless internet, satellite television, etc.) are converging is making the call for media education and media literacy relevant to all societies on the planet.

The Alliance of Civilizations recognizes this necessity and supports initiatives focusing on the development of media education. Media literacy has been the focus of one of the first educational initiatives that the Alliance has developed, identifying media education as a fundamental tool that enables individuals to take a critical stance in the face of media messages that encourage violent cultural and religious confrontations. It is well agreed among experts that a «media literate» person is a much more difficult target for media messages infused with cultural fanaticism. In addition to this publication, the Alliance is also implementing other initiatives that are supporting the global development of media education, such as the Clearinghouse on Media Literacy Education¹ and the creation of an UNESCO-AoC Chair on Media Literacy and Cross-Cultural Dialogue². Ultimately, our goal with this publication is to generate a trusted source of reference for policy makers, researchers and educators looking for information on best practices that will encourage the implementation of media education programs in their respective countries and regions.

Notes

¹ Please visit: www.aocmedialiteracy.org.

² This UNESCO/UNITWIN network has been originally created in collaboration with five universities: Aut3noma de Barcelona University (Spain), Cairo University (Egypt), Tsinghua University (China), Sao Paulo University (Brazil) and Temple University (USA). It will generate cross-cultural resources and curricula aiming at the development of media literacy programs that take into account cultural and religious differences while encouraging open dialogue, respect and mutual understanding.