

INTRODUCTION

Media Education Policy: Towards a Global Rationale

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The importance of media education is being gradually recognized worldwide. After the time of the lonesome innovators isolated in their classrooms, after the time of extended communities of practice around researchers and field practitioners working at the grassroots level, the moment of policy-makers has arrived. A threshold has been reached, where the body of knowledge concerning media literacy has matured, where the different stakeholders implicated in education, in media and in civil society are aware of the new challenges developed by the so-called «Information Society», and the new learning cultures it requires for the well-being of its citizens, the peaceful development of civic societies, the preservation of native cultures, the growth of sustainable economies and the enrichment of contemporary social diversity.

Globalization is also providing new opportunities for change and for

interconnections as the role of overarching governance bodies and Inter-Governmental Organizations (UNESCO, European Commission, Council of Europe, Alliance of Civilizations, ISESCO, SEGIB, The Arab League, Nordicom's International Clearing-house on Children, Youth and Media, among others) supports the urgent need for a worldwide, coherent and sustainable development. The ground-breaking Grunwald Declaration (1982), followed by the more recent Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning (2005) as well as the Paris Agenda for Media Education (2007) already encapsulate a number of principles and objectives that collectively aim at similar goals. A number of negotiated tools such as UNESCO's Media Education Kit (2007) and UNESCO's current initiative «Training the Trainer on Media and Information Literacy curricula», as well as the Alliance of Civilizations' multi-faceted support of media literacy all point at the feasibility and desirability of the process. They come in the wake of a new international framework towards building «Knowledge Societies». This framework has been elaborated during and after the World Summit on Information Society (2003-05) and the Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). These world events have helped, albeit insufficiently, to raise awareness about the role of media, old and new, and enabled a better understanding of Information and Communication processes. There remains the important task of turning high principles into operational applications.

The time for policy-making has thus come, that calls for shared experiences in implementation. Definitions, curriculum development and evaluations no longer are questions of interest for researchers and educators alone: they are defining options for the future and require strategies that can be shared, tested and adopted in a spirit of social change that goes beyond school reform. Regional initiatives already exist, such as the European Commission's communication that recommends all member states to provide national assessments on the level of media literacy of their citizens (2007), the First Conference on Media Education of the Middle East in Saudi Arabia (2007), the International Media Literacy Research Forum (London and Hong Kong, 2008) or the First Africa Media Literacy Conference in Nigeria (2008).

It is therefore timely and necessary to consider the policy frameworks that are shaping the sector and influencing its content and social impact. The purpose of the experiences assembled in this collection is to map some of the most relevant practices that exist at regional level and to highlight the underlying educational and media cultures that support them. It is hoped that such a process can serve as a diagnostic tool and an inspirational guide to implement and evaluate policy in countries that would want to establish their own framework. It can help decision-makers, educators, media professionals, researchers, and activists to activate reforms responding to the social need for media education among nations around the world.

Within this global context, the contributors in this mapping project aim at revealing the articulations between the different spheres of society and the different actors of media education, as well as the interactions among them, in the development of contemporary Knowledge Societies. They go beyond the description of programmes

and take into consideration issues, challenges and outcomes, pointing towards solution-oriented recommendations and open initiatives. The contributions transcend the case-studies or the examples of common-sense practices in order to offer interpretive perspectives on three transversal themes: the relation between the local and the global in media education strategies and policies, the public interest value of media education and the benefits of multi-partnership involvements and implementations. While the scope of this report is global, obviously, not all media education programmes at regional or national level could be profiled in it. Countries such as Austria, New Zealand or Australia, for example, where solid programmes on media education are being developed by their respective governments, are not included in this publication¹. Three sections articulate these transversal themes, with full awareness that there is no «one-size fits all» solution and that context matters. The first section examines the crucial points within media education: its definition and its core competences, as well as its implementation in a cross-cultural perspective, with development and human rights issues as major stakes. The second section focuses on capacity-building and enabling environments within the schools: it reviews and assesses state reforms, teacher training, curricular development and standard-setting practices with case studies from several regions of the world. The third section considers media education actors outside the educational setting, analyzing the role of regulatory bodies, private sector and civil society, in their capacity to raise awareness among adults and youth alike and to promote civic agency and participation as well as North-South, South-South and East-West exchanges.

Section one re-enforces the «centrality» of reaching a core definition of media education, for all actors to be convinced of its importance in the global knowledge society and to place it as a top priority in the public agenda. If media education is a lifelong process, media and information literacy consists of the operational skills and cognitive competences needed to acquire it. Literacy can be seen as encompassing info-competence and other text- and image-based skills to interpret media messages and communication services. Compared to other scholastic subjects, media education is not about input but about output, fostering the learners' inductive capacities to acquire and produce knowledge, as Lau and Cortes demonstrate. Their framework for «information literacy indicators» stresses the need to combine information and communication sciences as well as the synergies between libraries and schools, for the use of media as critical resources for (self-) development.

To implement such a framework, curricular development is key, and education sciences have to be brought in, as underlined by Opertti. He emphasizes the importance of the political and technical components of such a process of «educability». Media education is an agent for soft change, as it produces inclusion and helps fight poverty, marginalization and segregation. One of the key supports for media education is also «employability», a point stressed by Naji, who focuses on «the current gap between training and employment». He takes the case of information producers like journalists but his analysis could be extended to other categories of workers who don't have the skills and competences to deal with labour conditions more and more based on media and ICTs. Das reinforces this perspective for development, building

on Sen's «capability» model, based on «functionings» i.e. the competences a person needs to achieve his or her goals within local living conditions: the opportunities afforded by media education then encompass their civic agency as well as their employability. He insists on the fact that such a literacy allows for the conversion of commodities like media into functionings, that serve basic needs to fight poverty and deprivation as much as fundamental needs to foster freedom and social justice. Freedom of expression is the focus of Moeller's «global media literacy» experiment, that connects media education to freedom of expression –not in a highly abstract and remote manner but in a way that fosters a hands-on, grassroots civic appropriation of ethics. Her curriculum could be extended to other human rights, like the right to privacy, to intellectual property, to education... Her model, like all the ones proposed here, insists on «good governance, economic development and informed citizenship» and suggests a dynamic process that can be adopted in all sorts of contexts.

Section two shows how, worldwide, the last two decades have seen a number of changes that confirm the «inevitability» of media and information literacy. These changes are related to technological developments that turn media into intrusive and extensive prostheses, to economic developments that leave no country out of the media loop, to social developments that reveal a new awareness of youth, citizenship and consumption and to political developments that seek to manipulate media for ideological purposes while civic participation keeps putting pressure on governments to provide more social justice. Media education has changed too and progressed via research and practice to the point that it is often a research report that creates the triggering event at the origin of national reform. As such it can be «an agent of change» as Cheung explains in the case of Hong Kong. According to him, for successful school reform, media education is key. The three major ingredients are to connect it to civic agency, to information technologies and to curriculum review, in view of «new literacies» that are not just construed as negative political criticism but also as positive creative interaction. Jeong and her colleagues add an additional ingredient: to connect to existing communities of practice. The example of South Korea shows how teachers and educators seized on media even before their governments, as a grassroots initiative. In many countries, reforming schools to include media education is actually a way of legitimizing a decade's long situation. There is no need to reinvent the wheel, since the human and material resources exist, as exemplified by the Ontario case. Wilson and Duncan focus on nine key tenets for successful implementation of reform: grassroots communities of practice, curriculum development, research support, in-service training, communication networks, relevant media materials, professional organization of media education teachers, evaluation and collaboration with parents and media professionals.

As these tenets become clearer and clearer, resistance to change also becomes clearer, when it used to be clad in a cloak of silence and secrecy, and therefore difficult to act upon. Some useful lessons have been drawn from past successes and failures. Akyeamong locates resistance within the need to re-conceptualise teacher education curriculum practices on constructivist and cognitive ideas about knowledge and its production. The critical approach much touted by media educators is not so

much about criticizing politics but criticizing one's own learning strategies. Bringing expensive ICTs within the curriculum won't lead to any efficient results if long-standing traditions of teaching are not enriched with cognitive competences among teachers even before among students. Saleh locates resistance within the need to re-conceptualise capacity-building so as to connect media production to media education, reminding everybody that a healthy and free media profession can lead to a proficient and literate citizenry. What he describes as «the vicious cycle of oxymora» in the MENA region is actually valid in many places, where the gap between the profession's performance and citizen's expectations is quite wide. He alerts us to the possible «wrong» uses of media literacy as they can lead to distortion and censorship. According to Saleh, media education can be an instrument for tolerance and cross-cultural understanding if five issues are correctly addressed: backing reform on broad sectors of society, supporting human rights to re-energize the social contract between leaders and their people, changing the media flow to improve trustful communication between governments and citizens, implementing laws with real civic engagement and raising the public's awareness about their rights for the well being of the whole society.

Section three emphasizes the increasing «respectability» of media education, outside traditional education sectors, with other actors involved either around youth or around media. The role of the state is key in this perspective, as coordinator of multi-stakeholder initiatives. Morduchowicz shows that adopting media education in the state public agenda by creating a special department in the ministry of education provides the capacity for outreach to a variety of actors (media producers, journalists, artists...) whose social responsibility can be called upon. Two are fundamental: media associations and private companies. They can be invited as partners but shouldn't intervene «in the elaboration of the objectives, the contents or the design of the initiatives» as a way to ensure that commercial interests don't capture the process but serve it. Implicating the private sector can be an efficient means to bridge the cultural and social divides. Avoiding the risk of capture or the clash between the distinctive missions of the school and business seems best to be done with «city diplomacy» often enlarged to creative regions, as exemplified by Camps in the case of the Catalan Generalitat, in Spain. She identifies another key space for coordination and multi-stakeholderism: the media regulatory bodies. They can act as media education labs to impulse the state public agenda and to manage efficient scaling-up. They can address content issues, so crucial to education, without the suspicion of censorship, as «they are in a good situation to propose interpretations of the legal norms and their implementation, as well as they are able to persuade media professionals of their ethical responsibility in the interpretation and implementation of the law».

Education is part of the obligations of public service radio and television and media literacy should naturally find its place within this mission that needs to be constantly recalled. But the public value of such a literacy can also be recognized by private media, as exemplified by Salomon in the case of OFCOM, the UK media regulator. She reviews different types of regulation from around the world, stressing the need for independence of regulatory bodies and establishing the basis for a broad consensus on what is regulated, from cultural values to consumer protection and

youth empowerment. She considers the future of media education «as part of the self-regulation process», insisting on the need for major public policy choices regarding digital convergence as all countries will be moving from a scarcity rationale to an abundance rationale. Media education is seen as a necessary tool for audiences in decision-making so as to select out information from noise, and to discriminate valuable information resources from irrelevant delivery. Orhon also stresses the need to deal pro-actively with abundance, which engages such emerging countries as Turkey in the global media but also in «the global media literacy debate». He shows how the debate can be constructed locally, by multi-stakeholders such as universities, foundations and NGOs together with communities of practice in the field. The regulating authority can help in convening such actors together, with a view to infuse materials and human resources back into the schools. Banda takes this one step further, in a sustainable development perspective, pushing for «postcolonial revisionism of the liberal modes of thought and practice about media» as a way of combating the civic apathy of entire populations. He proposes a model for cultivating active citizenship and promoting an informed adherence to human rights that is connected also to an emancipatory vision of journalism to restore trust between people and their media. Turning civic apathy into civic agency is also Kotilainen's concern. The Finnish example aptly concludes this world tour of media education with a focus on youth as media producers and creators of the network cultures of the future. Civic engagement is positively correlated with media literacy and generates «experiences of influence in society» that suggests cross-generational strategies for building dialogue across different sectors and age-groups in a given society.

Ultimately this analysis, with its emphasis on the centrality, inevitability and respectability of media and information literacy, lays the challenge of reducing the implementation gap at the door of the decision-makers, testing their political will to proceed forward with media education. Policy-makers need to overcome the perceived risks that media education might threaten governmental power, national sovereignty and even the cultural identity of a country. In fact, it can lead to everybody's empowerment if set within a framework of good media governance where the benefits of the new cognitive ways of learning are shared, people-centred and not simply machine-induced. Resisting that move can bring confrontation and violence, whereas adopting it can bring not only soft change but «smart» change, while protecting and developing autochthonous cultures at the same time. Using media and ICTs with cohesion and inclusion can foster trust and respect among all members in a society and benefit all stakeholders involved.

Developing a coherent rationale is key, especially if governments show any readiness in pursuing their rights and responsibilities, that can be summed up in the 3 P's of sound Public Policy: Provision of media education for all their citizens, Participation of all their citizens in social, cultural and economic activities, and Protection of all citizens in need (either because of their age, their disabilities or their income). The growing worldwide consensus on the public value of media education entails a change of scale so that isolated classroom practices become generalized in national curricular development. It also entails a global, shared rationale that can be summarized in a

nutshell as revolving around the 6 C's of the Competences for media education: Comprehension, Critical Capacity, Creativity, Consumption, Citizenship and Cross-Cultural Communication. The overarching structure of such a rationale needs to be buttressed against the human-rights framework, with dignity and the construction of identity and solidarity at the core.

Policy-makers have thus a vested interest in finding the right scale of interaction for media education as it can be a means for digital dynamics rather than divides. They can do so by using different rungs of governance (local, regional, state, federal...) as well as by identifying sites and entities that have the legitimacy to call upon actors that generally don't speak together to dialogue on a par (ministries of education, communication and culture, private companies and civil society associations, researchers and professionals, etc.). Media education holds the potential of reducing the disconnects between old and new media, high and low culture, proprietary and non-proprietary contents, cultural and commercial conflicts, etc. It offers a scenario for sustainability, especially with shared resources and open source initiatives. Ultimately, it can help reach the goals of the Millennium Declaration, especially the eradication of poverty and illiteracy, within Knowledge Societies.

Note

¹ We encourage the reader to visit the Alliance of Civilizations' Clearinghouse on media literacy (aocmedialiteracy.org) and participate there by updating and/or uploading relevant information to this mapping exercise.