

Media wisdom? Media literacy and the changing position of libraries

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ABSTRACT

The attention for media literacy is increasing in recent years. The European Commission and several national governments are nowadays very involved in the importance of media literacy among their citizens. In the Netherlands (and other EU-countries) new media literacy programmes or pilot projects are being implemented.

This paper discusses the importance and theoretical foundations of media literacy. The practical implementation of the new policy on media literacy in Europe and The Netherlands is discussed. Finally the implications for libraries will be addressed. Is the library suitable for implementing these policies? How can the library position itself within this field? No definitive answers will be given. A pilot project 'journalistic' media wisdom by the Public library of Amsterdam is presented as a promising example of a new direction in media

literacy.

Contributors of this paper have taught a course on media literacy (Media Wisdom) for students of Information and Media at The Institute for Media and Information Management in Amsterdam.

KEYWORDS: Media literacy, Media education, Media policy, Libraries, The Netherlands

1. INTRODUCTION

Media literacy and media education is not an integrated part of the curriculum of many schools in the Netherlands and elsewhere. However, for the last couple of years, it is increasingly a priority for the Dutch government. Developing media literacy programmes and coaching students (and educators!) in cooperation with libraries, schools and other organizations is recommended by most parties involved. Media literacy has not only in the Netherlands risen on the priority list of policy makers, but in many European countries it is an important topic these days.

This paper will start off with an introduction of the idea of media literacy. Why is media literacy of importance? And what are the theoretical foundations of this subject? Secondly we will look at the practical implementation of the new policy on media literacy in The Netherlands. Finally we will address the implications of all this for the library. Is the library fit for implementing these policies? How can the library position itself within this field? No definitive answers will be given but we will show a promising example of a new media wise project by the Public library of Amsterdam.

2. MEDIA, SOCIETY, AND CITIZENSHIP

The importance of media literacy can be underscored by pointing out the importance of media within modern societies. Our society is saturated with a variety of media, old and new. Furthermore this media function within civil society is important for citizenship.

Citizenship is usually interpreted in the political sense of electorate. Citizenship then means being informed and participating in debate within a public sphere. Within this traditional discourse of citizenship, media is predominately appreciated for its function to inform and critique. By providing us with 'reality in the raw' media can inform us, and we as citizens can use this information to shape our world view and opinions. Also the media can be a public arena for debate (Habermas 1994). Broadcasting exemplifies this idea well: by providing as many people as possible with a broad spectrum of media content, everybody will be included in the public media domain and will be able to establish a well-informed opinion.

However, in recent years this rational and instrumental form of citizenship seems to be hard to uphold. Old boundaries - like those between private and public, and high and low culture - have become less sharp. More attention has been given to the personal, daily life, smaller values, and identity. Also technological changes have caused a change in the use of media. With the

extensive use of computers and the dawning of networks like web 2.0 (and shortly web 3.0) there are not only readers, listeners and viewers within the public, but also many producers.

This shift has been addressed using the term participatory culture. Henry Jenkins (2006,p.8) distinguishes four forms of participatory culture:

***Affiliations** — memberships, formal and informal, in online communities centered around various forms of media, such as Friendster, Facebook, message boards, metagaming, game clans, or MySpace.*

***Expressions** — producing new creative forms, such as digital sampling, skinning and modding, fan videomaking, fan fiction writing, zines, mash-ups.*

***Collaborative Problem-solving** — working together in teams, formal and informal, to complete tasks and develop new knowledge, such as through Wikipedia, alternative reality gaming, spoiling.*

***Circulations** — Shaping the flow of media, such as podcasting, blogging.*

This changing role – in which the media user has become a producer as well as a consumer – has implications for the position of the government in creating an open public sphere through their media policy. The Dutch government used to focus on providing and guaranteeing a pluriform and free media landscape via public broadcasting. Now they are also developing a policy to stimulate citizens to develop skills, knowledge and (critical) attitude, which they need to participate in a mediated society (OCW 2007).

3. MEDIA LITERACY COMPETENCES

More people than ever before are using the internet as the main source for their information needs. Fast and easy are the most important criteria, whilst the reliability of the information seems to be of a lesser concern. Internet is winning the long-term battle with the library as provider of information in all age categories (Nijboer 2007). The younger generation replaced the library and the encyclopaedia for internet resources. 'Search engines are rated higher than librarians' was one of the main conclusions of a large survey by OCLC (Perceptions 2005). The Internet as the primary source for almost any kind of information has affected the raison d'être of libraries especially.

Last year we addressed, at BOBCATSSS 2008, the problems facing libraries and their information function, offering a long term strategy towards media education, media literacy, and digital citizenship in which the library could play a key role. In the long run this strategy will be hopefully successful in combating the demise of

information quality and maintain the position of the library as a primary resource for quality knowledge & information (Den Boef, Nijboer & Kircz 2008).

The library should play a key role to improve media competences of schoolchildren, students and other citizens. Today many internet users, including the educators, have the misconception that they regard themselves as information savvy. Even some educators do not know what criteria to use to when evaluating search results, the selection and use of information by students (Dirkx, Theuns & Timmers 2006). As long as educators don't have the essential skills, who is to blame for the media illiteracy and the information quality of assignments of students? Schools, libraries and the media have to work together to improve critical media behaviour and make citizens more media and information savvy.

4. MEDIA LITERACY POLICIES AND THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

In the introduction we mentioned that media literacy is an important issue for policy makers in Europe in recent years. In 2006 the EC launched an EU-wide survey of best media literacy practices. "Its objective was to identify the existing and possible approaches to media literacy and to provide a description of its emerging trends throughout Europe" (European 2007 B). More than 100 submissions were received from 23 EU member states. To our surprise, only one Dutch organisation, "Stichting Krant in de Klas" (Newspaper in the Classroom), responded to the survey. In December 2007, the EC sent a "Communication" to the European Parliament, the Council, the European and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions with a European approach to media literacy in the digital environment and to incorporate media literacy in their policies (EC 2007 A).

It will mean a further step towards a European policy on media literacy.

In the Netherlands several advisory boards and organizations have been working on this subject for a number of years. In 2005 the government was advised by the Raad voor Cultuur (Council for Culture) to develop policy on 'media wisdom' (RvC 2005). Many recommendations of the Council are already incorporated in the policies of the present Dutch government (OCW 2007; OCW 2008). Several new (pilot) programmes have been started within this field.

In Europe, many organisations in EU member states have also started projects to improve media literacy among their citizens (often with grants from the EC or from their own government). An example is the European Charter for Media Literacy (European 2008 A), supported by governments, (educational and media) institutions and their representatives from eight European countries. The aims of the Charter are:

- "to foster greater clarity and wider consensus in Europe on media literacy and media education;
- to raise the public profile of media literacy and media education in each European nation, and in Europe as a whole.
- to encourage the development of a permanent and voluntary network of media educators in Europe, bound together by their common aims, and enabled by their institutional commitment".

Another example is Euromeduc, a European exchange network for media literacy. It intends to widen the already existing network around the European Charter for Media Literacy (European 2008 B). In Oct. 2009 it will organize a European congress about media literacy in Bellaria, Italy. With support of the EC it organised three seminars from June 2008 to February 2009: "Media production by young people and media literacy (Paris), "Lifelong Media Learning: innovative practices outside school" (Brussels) and "Media literacy and appropriation of Internet by young people" (Faro).

Yet another initiative is the European network Media4[ME]¹. The network "links media education with social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and human rights issues by exchanging intercultural good practice and methodologies between members, by promoting and sharing research and by designing joint activities for youngsters, adults and minorities in Europe". The network wants to encourage and improve intercultural media awareness and media empowerment (e.g. a more effective use of media and participation in media debates by minority groups. Media4[ME] takes media literacy a step further than the existing media literacy initiatives. In May 2008 the Media4[ME] network, in cooperation with Mira Media, the Association of Public Libraries and the Dutch National Press Fund organized a European conference Media4[ME] in the Museum of Communication in The Hague. Almost 300 visitors, mostly journalists, film directors, teachers, librarians, researchers and policy makers, from 20 different countries, participated in workshops and exchanged ideas and experiences with media literacy projects. Several participants gave presentations of media projects in the framework of media education, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and citizenship.

1 Network members are:

[Mira Media](#) (the Netherlands)

[Centre for Social Inclusion](#) Manchester Metropolitan University(UK)

[JFC Mediumzentrum](#) Cologne (Germany)

[Centro Zaffiria](#) (Italy)

[Media Education Centre](#) (Serbia)

[The School of Arts of Stockholm](#) (Sweden)

[Utrechts Centre for the Arts](#) (the Netherlands)

[ARSIS](#) (Greece)

[British Film Youth Academy](#) (UK)

Since the Dutch government has developed policy on media literacy, many new initiatives have been developed. Nationwide a new expert centre was launched in May of 2008 (Mediawijsheid Expertisecentrum). This expert centre is a network of organizations and professionals in media production and media research who work together on several educational projects. Also they will provide help and advice for people who have questions concerning the media. 'Beeld en Geluid,' an institute which holds the Dutch audio visual archives, will be the expert centre at the national level. At this moment the Mediawijsheid Expertisecentrum is developing and the service centres do not yet exist. The local libraries will play a major role in the developing process of the service centres (Kwartiermakersgroep 2008).



Figure 1: Beeld en Geluid

5. MEDIA LITERACY IN A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MEDIA WORLD

The Media4Me conference and the seminar of Euromeduc about media production by young people and media literacy in Paris in the Summer of 2008 underlined clearly that teaching media literacy in a multidimensional media world isn't the same as a few years ago. Broadband and web 2.0 applications mean that an ever-growing number of passive media consumers turn into media producers, making use of the interactive opportunities of the Internet to create independent content. If bloggers, Facebook users, YouTube producers etc. become more critical media consumers it is certainly worth a discussion. However some participants of the Media4[Me] conference last year, were very confident that "people producing news items become (automatically) critical media users". The material we find on YouTube doesn't convince us that producing items on YouTube makes one a more critical media consumer. The results of a library programme of the public library in the Hague in the Summer of 2007 (Jaarverslag 2008) in which 600 children produced 200 YouTube movies about their neighbourhood, hobbies, celebrities etc. (www.youtube.nl/youbieb) was with regard to participation successful. With regard to critical media behaviour, one of the goals of the project, it wasn't too promising in our opinion.

If you want to improve critical media behaviour by producing YouTube movies, you have to create a different setting. E.g. a high school student or group of children have an assignment to produce a movie of five minutes with interviews in their own neighbourhood about a certain social or economic issue. They need to prepare the interviews, have to gather and select

information and have to determine which questions to ask and, last but not least, select the interviewees. They must edit the interviews to such an extent that only a few minutes of a number of interviews will be included in the final version. All the decisions made during the different stages of the production have to be justified and reflected upon. Even basic ethical journalistic principles have to be applied during the production process.

6. WEB 2.0 AND MEDIA LITERACY

The recent trend is to include media production in the media literacy programmes. The approach shown above will be a challenge for schools and libraries. Are libraries and schools up to this challenge? Many libraries are already struggling with Web 2.0 applications in their services. In a survey conducted by OCLC in 2007 only 15% of library directors in the States saw a role for the libraries in social networking (Sharing 2007).

Social networking offers libraries and schools opportunities to create new media literacy programmes and to move away from the more traditional approach of media education. The role has to be expanded and with social networking tools the library can also function as a platform and playground for producing media content. The library as an extension of the newsroom? It brings a *journalistic flavour* into the teaching of media literacy in libraries and schools. Recently a couple of projects started in the Netherlands in which the library plays a central role in the media production and media consumption. Cooperation and collaboration between libraries, schools, broadcasters, film producers and local councils in these projects are essential to create effective media literacy programmes. One of the main goals of such a project in Amsterdam is e.g. to encourage intercultural critical media behaviour. In the next paragraph we will give a short introduction of this project.

7. PILOT PROJECT 'JOURNALISTIC' MEDIA LITERACY

Six 'community media centres' will be created in 2008 and 2009 in branches of the public library Amsterdam. The centres are located in multicultural neighbourhoods of Amsterdam. These community media centres offer new opportunities in using and producing (new) media. Librarians and teachers are getting an intensive media literacy course to become 'media coaches' (ten days of company training). The media coaches of the pilot will also follow a beginner's course in filming, editing, sound and interview techniques (4-6 days). A pre-pilot runs from November 2008 till February 2009. We hope to be able to inform you about the preliminary results during the BOBCATSSS conference.

The main pilot will run from February 2009 till June 2009. The parties involved are: 'Koers Nieuw West' (the four local councils of the Amsterdam-West area, which has a very multicultural population), a multicultural high school ('NOVA College'), NOVA television (news programme from the Dutch national broadcasting org.) and the public library Amsterdam. The participants will develop a new educational concept for media literacy (NovaLocal 2008). One of the outcomes of the pilot-project is to produce an educational package of media literacy, which will be available to other schools and libraries in the Netherlands. The project was made possible by a generous grant of ISB (an innovation fund to stimulate library renewal in the Netherlands).

The main goals of the project are:

- increased awareness of the participating high school students of the threats and opportunities of media consumption and production via different channels;
- increased knowledge and insight of librarians and teachers of effective pedagogical and didactic methods to increase media literacy among different groups of high school students with a strong multicultural background.
- usable products for the participating parties (tested and evaluated lesson plans, a new public library service to schools and news items to be broadcasted on Nova tv)
- a better understanding and acknowledgement of the participants of each others contribution towards the end result.

In some other major cities in the Netherlands, similar projects on a smaller scale have been proposed or just started. We hope that these projects improve intercultural media awareness and media empowerment and become successful. Let's hope that libraries will be involved, like the public library Amsterdam, in the implementation of new media literacy programmes.

The question remains if every library will be suitable for implementing these new media literacy policies in the next couple of years? The rules of Web 2.0/3.0 are not very clear and the rules for the library in this respect will be equally unclear. How can the library position itself in this field? The pilot project in Amsterdam creating a media community centre in the middle of the library (an extension of the newsroom), is in our opinion an exciting project which not only encourages intercultural critical media behaviour among the participants, but it also strengthens the educational and information function of the library, which is so much threatened by the googlization of society.

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