

Media Literacy

**World Journalism Education Congress
July 5-7, 2010, Grahamstown, South Africa**

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Who needs Media Literacy?

We do.

“Journalism education has always been an insular field; Media Literacy provides its [journalism education’s] first example of being able to look beyond itself into a broader context,” according to Joe Foote, University of Oklahoma, USA. “Media literacy may decide the future of the profession of journalism as we know it.”

Media Literacy (ML) takes journalism teaching beyond just peer-to-peer competency.

The journalism profession and journalism education field have a huge stake in the success of ML. Why? The demand side for journalism is threatened.

ML can help citizens understand why journalists make the choices that they make and can help journalists build a broader base of understanding for the critical things that they do.

ML can also teach professional journalists the value of communication theory and how to use it to better reach their target audiences – citizens, power elites, etc.

For ML, it is more useful to think about the outcomes of teaching, rather than definitions of what media literacy is. For example, we should not be focused on technology, we should be technology neutral.

- In considering ML, is “literacy” more important than “media”?
- Is ML about being literate about media, or is it about a mediated world?

Answer: It’s about both.

Where in the university should we locate the teaching of ML?

Everywhere.

We need it as much as possible in every course across the university -- much we are doing in university curricula across the board really reflect on ML.

- Many people interested in media effects are not interested in journalism.
 - ML is a way of journalism programs offering a service to the rest of the university.

We also need ML in education schools.

- To teach the teachers, train the trainers:
 - We need to develop a curriculum for teachers that covers what media and ML are.
- A concern: General teacher education only lasts two years and is already crammed with subject education. So we need to think about what time frame is needed for someone to understand ML.
 - We need to deliver ML training in only one week if we're going for mass education. At the university level the teaching can be lengthy, but for other audiences, such as civil servants, we can't go for more time than that. The focus must be on delivering basic/core skills.

And last but not least, ML needs to be taught within journalism programs – it needs to add a different perspective to students from all media disciplines.

How do we create ML modules?

- Via clothes-line models—we can create one stand-alone course, or create modules that can be inserted into other courses.
 - For example, a module could easily be placed into an ethics course.

Journalism programs can provide the materials to departments across the university

- For other departments: Teach the basic ML concepts, and ask students about their own media consumption.
 - Link concepts to first-hand experiences.

Challenges

To get every journalism/mass communication faculty member on board, especially those who don't have a journalism background.

- Get every member of the faculty to buy into the idea that journalists themselves need this.

Should ML/journalism education be delivered outside the academy?

Yes.

An example from Uganda: One of the problems that we're finding is that it is difficult to get the public to understand media freedom. People are not listening, and government officials ask us: Who really cares? We now believe that we have to take media issues "out there—outside the university classrooms." It's difficult, expensive and labor intensive, but we have to do it. Media rights are actually being fought for by the members of the public. We need a strategy—with schools, with media—concepts are important. You need to be able to package concepts so people can understand them.

Media literacy teachers worldwide should:

- Teach ML to parents -- ML should be on the frontline in dealing with new quagmires such of cyber-bullying, etc.
- We have students from journalism, NGOs and the government. We can work outside and teach outside the university.

Needs

Curriculum development and materials—those materials should cover concepts including journalism responsibility, skills and capacity building.

- ML resource access (for teachers/parents)
 - Books
 - Websites with uploaded articles
- New media research is needed, don't stop at discourse and reflection.
 - Data/studies that are not only about media effects, but categorized as ML. (localized data does exist)
- Social media is an increasing factor and a more central part of the media experience. Communication theory should be applied to social media research, and the role of ML in a social media context should be examined.
- Need more overall theories that place ML in context in our field, and need easy international access to these theoretical articles. For example, it's difficult to access such articles in China, Nigeria, etc.

Media literacy is a social cause—we need to think about it as media advocacy

ML should be mass education and directly linked to human rights/Article 19: giving citizens — of all ages and professions—the capability to defend their rights—and the knowledge and understanding to demand the conditions to enjoy that right.

ML should also provide citizens with the knowledge and abilities to demand better services from media and to give them the capabilities to themselves be responsible members of the communication chain—and even producers of news.

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