

media education in four eu countries

common problems and
possible solutions

How do Finland,
Sweden and the
UK tackle media
education? and how
does that compare to
the Netherlands?



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Kennisnet aims to make ICT work for education and is the public ICT partner for the education sector. With its expertise, facilities and innovation, Kennisnet helps the sector to benefit to the maximum from ICT. Kennisnet is affiliated with *Mediawijzer.net*, the expertise centre for media literacy.

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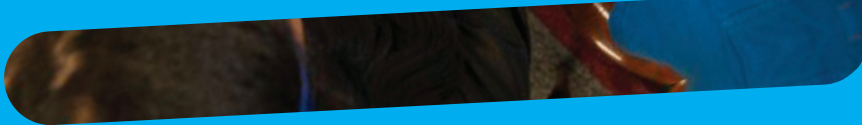
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introduction



It's no longer an advantage to be media literate; rather, it is a debilitating disadvantage not to be.

Paolo Celot, media literacy researcher, 2009

“The media landscape has changed enormously in recent years.” Nowadays, that is stating the obvious, but that doesn't mean it isn't perfectly true:

- almost all households are now online;
- laptops, smartphones, and tablets have become absolutely normal, including at school;
- children are in constant contact with one another (via social media and WhatsApp);
- harassment is finding its way – via the smartphone – right into the bedroom;
- games and apps entice children to spend money;
- the boundaries between commerce, play, and education are becoming blurred.

Children growing up in this new media environment do not deal with it carefully and critically all by themselves – they need to learn how to do so. In other words, they need media education, with the goal of making them media literate. Countries differ in how they provide such media education.

Four European countries

How do various European countries tackle media education? Which countries are the leaders, how do they make children *media literate*, and what can we learn from them?

This report deals with media education in Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. There were two reasons to select these specific countries:

1. They are similar in many ways. With Denmark, Iceland, Luxembourg and Norway, they form a cluster of leaders (according to an analysis carried out by EAVI and DTI for the European Commission in 2011);
2. As regards policy, they complement one another in an interesting way. They tackle comparable challenges in different ways – based on their own traditions, and sometimes with very striking methods – leading to best practices that we can learn from.

Separate or integrated

Experts have long debated whether media literacy should be a separate school subject or should be integrated into other subjects. Each approach has its own particular advantages and disadvantages. As a separate subject, media education is often low on the list of priorities for schools and their teachers. But integrating it entirely into other school subjects means that it ultimately becomes “invisible”. In other words, it becomes difficult to test and difficult to teach because all the various teachers then just have to teach it “a bit”.

The experts who were interviewed for the purpose of this study seem to prefer a “cross-curricular” approach. Such an approach is more in line with the media themselves, which are not confined to one or other classroom, and with the kind of skills and competencies that now have a high place on many educational agendas. Nevertheless, there is no consensus about this.

Aim of the study

The main question explored in this study is: “What can countries learn from one another?” Our report does not say what *must* be done – there is no single right way of providing media education. What we do want to do, however, is to draw attention to ideas and methods that have been successful in other countries. We also want to point out the problems, because we can learn from them too.



The study aims to provide pointers for education professionals so that they can work on *media literacy* in such a way that all children are enabled to become critical and aware users of the media. That is not a goal in itself but an aid towards successful participation in the democratic society.

Terminology and definitions

In Dutch, we generally refer to *mediawijsheid* (literally “media wisdom”). In other countries, one normally speaks of *media literacy* (or “information literacy”). Here are the associated definitions:

The European Union applies the following definition of media literacy:

The ability to access, analyse and evaluate the power of images, sounds and messages which we are now being confronted with on a daily basis and are an important part of our contemporary culture, as well as to communicate competently in media available on a personal basis. Media literacy relates to all media, including television and film, radio and recorded music, print media, the Internet and other new digital communication technologies.

In the United Kingdom, media literacy is defined simply as:

the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts.

UNESCO uses the term Media & Information Literacy:

Media & information literacy stands for media and information literacy, and refers to the essential competencies (knowledge, skills and attitude) that allow citizens to engage with media and other information providers effectively and develop critical thinking and life-long learning skills for socializing and becoming active citizens.

This emphasis on citizenship can also be found in the Netherlands and Belgium:

Media literacy is the entire body of knowledge, skills, and mindset with which people can operate in an aware, critical, and active manner within a complex, changing, and fundamentally mediated world.

The main question here is whether media literacy should be understood *technically* – i.e. can pupils deal with the equipment and the software? – or *socially*, with media playing a role in civics.

Mediawijzer.net – a Dutch network organisation – argues that the term *media literacy* should be interpreted as broadly as possible:

- *Care and health* – Digital media are increasingly necessary in order to organise one’s own care, to make easy use of health-related apps, or to find a good GP, for example.
- *Life and development* – Government is increasingly requiring people to be self-reliant and to engage in lifelong learning. Dealing effectively and critically with the many different flows of information is necessary in order to ensure such self-reliance.
- *Work and money* – To increase their prospects on the labour market, people need to be able to deal effectively with the new media and to use them, for example, to maintain a network and to make new contacts.
- *Living together* – Being part of society increasingly involves an online component, not only to arrange official matters but also to participate in public debate.
- *Inspiration* – The media can uplift, inspire, and encourage creativity. Anyone who cannot make use of the media cannot participate.



Media literacy is therefore a broad concept that goes beyond simply knowing how a device works:

- The emphasis is sometimes placed on such aspects as privacy and protecting children from “inappropriate material”. In other cases, the emphasis is on information skills and citizenship. This is a question of taste and tradition.
- Somebody who is media literate knows in any case that tweets can be read by anybody, that not all websites that look trustworthy are in fact trustworthy, and that not all games have been created just to amuse the gamer.

At the highest level of abstraction, terms such as *media literacy* always involve empowerment, autonomy, participation, emancipation, and democratic citizenship. Protecting media users against “bad influences” – the more defensive approach – precedes this and is therefore subordinate to it.

It is difficult to say when somebody is genuinely “media literate” because the media to which that term refers are constantly changing. Ultimately, media literacy is an *attitude* based on:

- critical capacity;
- solid basic knowledge;
- mentality;
- know-how;
- skills.

Design of the study

This report is based on discussions with experts from Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and on published material. All this has been used to create a profile for each country. The profiles are preceded by an outline of the situation in Europe as a whole and followed by an analysis of the results.

The structure of the country profiles is not the same in each case because the available material was different. (The material has not all been translated into English, and the various countries do not all carry out as much research on media education.) It has been possible, however, to deal with a number of specific key aspects for each country, for example government policy, the curriculum, best practices, and the approaches adopted by the main parties involved.

The focus is on schools. This means that libraries – which play an important role in almost all the countries surveyed – have not been included in the study. We have also not considered media education focusing on games – or using games – because hardly anything has been published on that topic.

Structure of this publication

We discuss:

- Europe;
- Finland;
- Sweden;
- the United Kingdom;
- the Netherlands.

The report is concluded by an analyses and an overview of the literature consulted.



europa



Media literacy is a paramount goal of public policy if all European citizens are to enjoy the benefits of the Information Society fully.

Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner for Information Society and Media, 2009

At European level, media literacy is being developed in all kinds of different ways, for example via *the European Charter for Media Literacy* (euromedialiteracy.eu) and Insafe (saferinternet.org), a European platform for safe use of the Internet. *European Schoolnet* (eun.org) also devotes a lot of attention to media education. A website is currently being developed to show how various different countries organise media education.

Researchers who have studied all the various European curricula report that “some form of media education” is provided at 70% of primary schools and at 75% to 80% of secondary schools. Those figures are much higher than ten years ago.

The European media education landscape is therefore developing rapidly, and there is an increasing amount of international cooperation. “We have already set up a group of media literacy experts,” says Matteo Zacchetti (Brussels), coordinator of the European Commission’s media literacy programme. “The idea is to put the experts in contact with one another. Networking activities are now very important – establishing new links, spending time with one another, and learning from one another. There are already informal networks at European level, and there are more and more of them.”

“I think a lot more needs to be done,” says Mr Zacchetti, “and that countries can learn a lot from one another. Different countries are dealing with media education in very different ways. ‘Media literacy’ is also a broad term, and the media are constantly changing. I think that it ultimately makes no difference whether you analyse a film, an article, or a website. You have the content and the medium. It doesn’t matter in what form the content is presented. The point is for media consumers to go beyond a merely superficial reading. They need to be able to decipher the report that is being presented to them and to understand how the media industry works. It then makes no difference whether you’re looking at a newspaper, a game, or TV.”

The EU officially designated media literacy as a goal in 2007. Research is going on to survey the level of media literacy in various different countries. In 2009, the European Commission published a lengthy *Recommendation* emphasising the importance of media literacy:

Media literacy is a matter of inclusion and citizenship in today’s information society. It is a fundamental skill. ... Democracy depends on the active participation of citizens to the life of their community and media literacy would provide the skills they need to make sense of the daily flow of information disseminated through new communication technologies.

(European Commission Recommendation, 2009)

Mr Zacchetti emphasises that this also involves creative use of media for communication and participation in society.

According to the EU, media education is clearly important, but is it in fact being taught? And if so, as part of which school subjects? In 2011, the EU concluded:

- *Media Literacy does now appear in the primary and secondary curricula for the majority of the Members States who sent in responses. Not yet consistently as an independent subject in its own right, although most Member States try to integrate media literacy into the teaching of other subjects.*



- For most Member States “Media literacy” is taught as a cross-curricular theme which is incorporated into many if not all subjects. “Optional studies” in Media are often mentioned as being offered by some, but not all schools in Member States.
- It is clear from the responses that the term “media literacy” refers to different skill-sets according to different Member States. (EU Expert Group on Media Literacy, 2011)

European studies

A number of studies of media education are currently ongoing within Europe. The European Media Literacy Education Study (EMEDUS) involves a group of researchers – coordinated from Barcelona – who will be publishing an overview study in February 2014. Two years ago, the MEDEA project already published a comparative study of media education in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, and Romania. The results of a follow-up to that study will be presented at a conference in Brussels in December.

Sally Reynolds, the project manager for the MEDEA study, is already able to say something about the provisional results. Although MEDEA investigated different countries to those considered in the present study, the results still have implications for our own research.

“One important conclusion,” says Ms Reynolds, “is that some countries still do not have a clear, accepted definition of media literacy. That is particularly the case in Latvia and Romania. In Austria, Bulgaria and Greece, definitions now apply that are very similar to the EU’s definition. Belgium is a good example of a country with a clear definition that is supported by government.” Sally Reynolds says that a clear definition is a good indicator of how a country thinks about media education. Some countries have limited or disputed definitions, which often relate solely to ICT skills. On the other hand, there are also countries that have a broader concept of what is meant by media literacy, with more importance being attached to the attitudes and expectations of media uses.

Ms Reynolds continues: “A second important conclusion is that media literacy is still often included in the curriculum as a ‘cross-curricular’ objective. That fits in with the sort of skills and attitudes that we are talking about, but it causes two problems in actual practice. Firstly, teachers often don’t know what exactly they need to do to achieve those kinds of objectives – it’s only a small group of pioneers who succeed in doing so. Secondly, the cross-curricular objectives are not usually tested, and less attention is therefore paid to them. It is strange that, on one hand, there is a shift within education from ‘knowledge’ to ‘competencies and skills’ – a shift that enjoys broad support – while on the other hand we hang onto everything that we can quantify and measure, with the emphasis often being on scores, rankings, and indicators.”

The researchers conclude that as long as these contradictions prevail, the cross-curricular goals of education will probably always receive less attention than those that can be specifically tested. Later this year (2013), the MEDEA report will include recommendations regarding this point.

ICT at European schools

In 2011–2012, the EU surveyed 190,000 school pupils, teachers, and school heads to see how schools make use of digital technology. Consideration was also given to the use made of this technology¹ and to the skills of pupils and teachers.

¹ The Netherlands, the UK, and two other EU countries were not included because there was insufficient response to the survey.



The most striking finding was that there was no perceivable connection between the presence of digital technology at a school and effective use of it by teachers and pupils during lessons. Buying tablets or netbooks is therefore only an initial step for schools – it is no guarantee of better lessons, brighter pupils, or more self-confident teachers.

Almost all European schools now have broadband Internet access. About a quarter of pupils at EU schools are taught by teachers who are confident about using ICT in their teaching. The study also shows that pupils who already make use of modern technology at home deal with it more self-confidently at school. It is striking that teachers are more concerned about the use of ICT than school heads. At class level, they are concerned about obstacles when teaching with digital media.

Facts and figures:

- Half of pupils at EU secondary schools use a computer in the classroom once a week;
- 1 in 3 pupils use a digiboard once a week;
- 30 to 45% of pupils say that they also use their own mobile phone to help them learn.

Digital divide

There therefore continues to be a “digital divide” between, on the one hand, pupils who use digital technology at home and at school and, on the other, those who do not. As a result, pupils leave school having differing digital skills and therefore differing prospects in higher education and on the labour market.

This digital divide is a major unsolved problem. The other major issue is of a pedagogical-didactic nature, namely what constitutes responsible and effective use of ICT during lessons? The EU study shows that the majority of teachers have not yet decided what the answer is to that question. It is therefore a matter of “Work in Progress”.



FINLAND



Media literacy is the literacy of today. We all need media literacy skills in our different roles in the information society: as citizens, consumers, employees and students.

Paavo Arhinmäki, Minister of Culture and Sport, Finland, 2013

If you talk to Finns about media education in their country, you will definitely hear anecdotes about Angry Birds. Rovio Mobile – the creator of the app, which has been purchased more than 100 million times – is *the* Finnish success story in the field of apps and games. Although some people are starting to get rather tired of the Angry Birds, for media education experts an interesting development is taking place: Rovio now offers a complete educational programme related to Angry Birds. This is based on the expertise in the *Finnish National Curriculum for Kindergarten* and developed by the *Department of Teacher Education* at the University of Helsinki, and is intended to help young children in the context of early learning in maths, language, music, and art.

The program will provide the center with designated classroom and play zones featuring Angry Birds learning materials including activity books, toys, physical games, educational posters, mobile math resources, reference books, a five-string instrument, game cards and physical activity games on an interactive whiteboard.

Rovio is not the only company that is becoming involved in education and in that context focusing on the use of media. During a visit to Amsterdam, Saara Pääjärvi and Leo Pekkala from the *Finnish Centre for Media Education and Audiovisual Media* (MEKU) provided a great deal of information about the developments in Finland. A lot is going on in the field of media education, with more than 100 organisations seriously involved. That is a lot for this large, spacious country with a population of 5.5 million. “Most of the activity takes place around large cities such as Helsinki,” says Mr Pekkala. “But nobody really knew what was going on in other parts of the country, in really small communities. We carried out a study and found that a lot of organisations were all doing the same thing.” MEKU is now investigating how the various initiatives can be linked up with one another more closely.

Finland has an acclaimed education system, and it is even referred to as a “model country” where education is concerned. International comparative studies have repeatedly ranked Finland right at the top. That is mainly due to Finnish teachers, who are educated to a particularly high standard, with all subject specialists gaining a Master’s degree before starting work at a school. They undertake their teacher-training programme concurrently with their graduation work. Generalist teachers have to have taken a multidisciplinary Master’s degree before starting to teach, while infant-school teachers must have at least a Bachelor’s degree.

“The teaching profession is highly regarded in Finland,” says Leo Pekkala. “Only 10 to 15% of the students who want to become teachers qualify for the training programme. Entry to the programme is therefore highly competitive, and that gives the profession prestige. The fact that teachers are required to have taken a Master’s degree means that they are very high-quality professionals.”

Finland also ceased to have a national curriculum in 1970; it now only has a core curriculum with a set of general objectives. Finnish schools now put together their own learning pathways on the basis of the national core curriculum. In practice, teachers therefore have a great deal of freedom.

Mr Pekkala explains: “That is one of the reasons why our education system is so successful; it’s that teachers who decide what they want to teach, how, and when. That is not subject to national control. There are no national tests until pupils reach the end of secondary school, when they take a single standardised national test. The quality of the education provided is therefore really up to the teacher – it’s the teacher’s responsibility.”



But no matter how highly trained the teachers are, media education in Finland is not of the same high standard. In Finland, 81% of teachers and pupils have access to digital technology during lessons. Finland is therefore one of the best equipped countries as regards ICT. Nevertheless, Finnish teachers achieve only a low score for “self-assuredness” as regards the use of digital technology. The problem mainly concerns the pedagogical-didactic aspect of media use, not the actual operation of the new devices.

“Finnish schools are well-equipped as regards ICT,” says Saara Pääjärvi, “but the resources are not always used in the most pedagogically effective way. The problem is not any lack of equipment but insufficient understanding of how to use that equipment effectively. And also the readiness to do so.” In a ranking of the use of ICT during lessons, the Finns did not score as well as they had hoped.

“We don’t know exactly why,” says Leo Pekkala. “It’s probably a combination of reasons. One reason is that although we have the technology, the teacher-training programmes don’t usually focus much on media literacy, so teachers are not properly trained to make pedagogical use of media.” A single “media-based” teacher-training programme commenced at the University of Lapland in 1997, but otherwise there is no systematic focus on media literacy during teacher training.

Leo Pekkala goes on: “A lot of teachers also think that children are more talented than they are themselves. They see how the children play with the technology – that they have a lot of ‘surface skills’ – and they are afraid that they won’t be able to keep up with them.” Saara Pääjärvi adds that adults think that children are skilled media users because they make deft use of the technology. “In the long run,” she says, “that constitutes an obstacle to teaching them to be media literate.”

Nevertheless, the educational objectives have been formulated clearly. The Finnish term for media education – “*Mediakasvatus*” – means education *with* and education *about* media:

The objective of media education is an individual with media literacy skills who is able to utilize as well as produce media, to understand media production and expressions of media, to reflect on his personal relationship with media and to apply critical thinking as well as embrace self-expression.

Media Skills & Communication is a cross-curricular theme at Finnish primary schools. At secondary schools the subject is called *Communication and Media Competence*, with the emphasis then being on competencies and knowledge. In Finland, media education is usually taught as part of mother tongue education. The emphasis is primarily on learning how to deal with text and language, from the perspective of exercising influence via the media on public debate. That requires practice, analysis, and knowledge. The curriculum explicitly states that pupils must improve their media literacy so that they can properly interpret the various messages that they receive from the media, can estimate the background and function of those messages, and can understand how those messages can influence individuals and society as a whole. Attention is also devoted to netiquette and to the responsibilities that media production involves.

One special initiative intended to put netiquette into practice was the *Pimp your Toilet* project earlier this year (2013). The 300 pupils who participated were given the assignment of decorating their school’s toilets in such a way that the pupils using them would think about online rights and responsibilities. This was basically a campaign, via the school toilets, to encourage responsible use of the World Wide Web. It reached more than 3000 pupils. Both the campaigners and their “audience” were able to learn from it. Pupils uploaded photos and video reports about their campaigns, with the best campaign receiving a prize.



This is an example of a creative, high-profile campaign that does not stick to the beaten path. Structurally speaking, it does not of course produce major results. Because media literacy is normally hidden away as part of mother tongue education, the representatives of MEKU do not know precisely what is actually taught.

“Nobody bears responsibility for media education,” says Saara Pääjärvi. “If you’re a maths teacher, you’re responsible for mathematics. We think it’s a good thing that media education is not taught as a separate subject because media doesn’t mean something separate and isolated from everything else. But the disadvantage is consequently that nobody is responsible for it.” MEKU is therefore afraid that the “20th-century skills” that we hear so much about are not being taught properly. “I think that they are written about more often than they are put into actual practice,” says Leo Pekkala.

Nevertheless, there is a great deal of investment in media education. As the Finnish government says in a booklet about this subject, “In Finland, media education work is carried out wherever children and young people are: not only in schools but also in different virtual communities and game worlds.” NGOs play an important role here. The government finances numerous projects and organisations, for example the *mediaeducation.fi* website, where experts can exchange experience and know-how in Finnish, Swedish, and English. As the booklet explains, the government and the private funding bodies are investing in media education because

The representatives of the field and the financiers share a common understanding: the development of civic and information society skills can be furthered through media education.

However, an extensive overview study – covering almost the entire history of media education in Finland – is highly critical about the financing for all the various initiatives:

[The] activities of organisations and projects are very much tied to projects and project finance, thus media education is constantly living on a hand-to-mouth basis and is dependent on the frequently fickle policies and financial conditions of sources of funding. Inherent in project economy is among other things the eternal compulsion for something new. In place of demonstrably good practices there is always a need to think up new projects for which funding may be applied for in a period of a couple of years and then it all starts again.

Success stories

Nevertheless, it is clear that Finland is making major efforts as regards media literacy. This year (2013), MEKU is organising a second special media literacy event – this time a full “media literacy week” – which brings together all the various organisations and experts. This is a success story where MEKU is concerned, because last year the event was only for a single day, *Safer Internet Day*. This year, the focus is less defensive, the conference is longer, and more organisations are involved.

The youngest target groups in Finland have already been reached. The Education Ministry recently produced a special project for children aged under 11.

“There has been a major shift in attitude,” says Saara Pääjärvi. “It’s no longer a question of ‘we have to protect our children from the media’. The approach is now much more positive and proactive.” One good example is the *Media Muffin Project* (2006–2007), a national programme focusing on media education at primary schools. According to the ministry in a leaflet about the project, one of the main achievements was the publication of a manual for child-care personnel, setting out the objectives and values of pre-school education in relation to the media. The government’s intention with the manual was to equip playgroups more effectively to deal with the new media situation:



The project produced materials and developed training for early childhood educators, giving them information on how to develop and improve the media skills of under school-age children. The materials consist of reading matter, suggestions for activities, and ideas to reflect on about the world of media and media education.

The programme was aimed at several thousand professionals, with the material being distributed to all Finnish playgroups. Training courses were also provided for teachers who wanted to know more about safe and responsible use of media in their teaching.

Teacher knows best

The MEKU website also provides teaching materials (and also materials for use during parents' evenings). "But the aim is not to produce a lot of material," says Saara Pääjärvi. "We want teachers to do that themselves. What we think is important is for them to incorporate media education into their own pedagogical and didactic thinking and into what they do on a day-to-day basis. Promoting specific material is not the key element in our work."

That does not mean that not much material is produced for teachers to use; material is in fact produced, for example by the *Finnish National Board of Education*, and there are also commercial initiatives. Nevertheless, the emphasis on production by individual teachers is typical of the Finnish educational model, with the teacher being central. MEKU therefore does not want to prescribe "the best material" or "how it should be taught". "We think the 'this is the best material' approach is problematical," says Leo Pekkala. "We have confidence in our well-trained teachers. If they decide that they need to do something about media education, then they will find a way of doing so. Promoting specific material can in fact backfire."

Saara Pääjärvi gives a striking example to clarify this point. "My aunt had been working at an infant school for 25 years – a special 'outside pre-school' with no activities indoors. Everything took place out in the woods, whether the children were eating, playing, or learning. But then there was an interview with someone from an NGO that is involved with nature in some way. They sat there explaining 'how to teach children about nature'. And there was my aunt – with 20 years experience *out there in the woods!* And the people from the NGO thought that they knew better! We want to prevent the same happening with media education. The general rule is 'teacher knows best'."

Film education

Finland has a long tradition in the field of film education, and a centre for film and TV education was set up as far back as 1958. There are numerous organisations that are very active in producing and distributing educational resources about film. The extent to which those resources are used depends on the teachers themselves. There is no system of national coordination, but the intention is that pupils go to the cinema at least once a year and afterwards "deconstruct" the film that they have seen.

At some secondary schools, pupils can choose film as an optional subject. Popular projects include *Videovankuri*, with pupils learning to take photographs and make videos, and *Koulukino* (School Cinema). The *Valve Film School for Children* is also important, allowing children to create their own films. This initiative focuses primarily on fostering cultural awareness, while the Kelaamo online community for young filmmakers also provides material for teachers.



Plusses and Minuses

- + In Finland, it is clear who “owns” media education, namely the teacher. Experts play an ancillary role, and they don’t tell the teacher what constitutes “good media education”.
- + The high quality of Finnish education means that the country’s media education is also of high quality.
- + The Finnish government is an unambiguous supporter of media education, including for the youngest children.
- Many organisations provide similar services and lesson packages. The fact that financial support is provided on a project basis means that a lot of work is done double.
- Teachers who do not devote attention to media literacy are not required to explain why.
- Finnish teacher training programmes still do not devote sufficient attention to good media education.

[Intermezzo] UNESCO: media & information literacy

As we have already pointed out, the EU attaches great value to media literacy. Brussels has called on Member States and businesses to invest in media literacy and to monitor progress. Even so, the European initiative is not very apparent in actual practice. Those directly involved in education more often refer to UNESCO – the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization – that already began working on media and information education in 1982.

In 2008, UNESCO published a curriculum and study programme for teacher-training organisations. In 2011, it published the voluminous *Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers*, which is now used by many teachers. This was followed in 2012 by the *Pedagogies of Media and Information Literacies* handbook, which was written by Finnish experts. UNESCO applies the concept of media and information literacy (MIL):

MIL stands for media and information literacy, and refers to the essential competencies (knowledge, skills and attitude) that allow citizens to engage with media and other information providers effectively and develop critical thinking and life-long learning skills for socializing and becoming active citizens.

The organisation associates MIL – in a deliberate and inspiring manner – with citizenship and human rights, with a central role being played by teachers:

We live in a world where the quality of information we receive largely determines our choices and ensuing actions, including our capacity to enjoy fundamental freedoms and the ability for self-determination and development. Driven by technological improvements in telecommunications, there is also a proliferation of media and other information providers through which vast amounts of information and knowledge are accessed and shared by citizens. Adding to and emanating from this phenomenon is the challenge to assess the relevance and the reliability of the information without any obstacles to citizens’ making full use of their rights to freedom of expression and the right to information. It is in this context that the need for Media and Information Literacy (MIL) must be viewed: it expands civic education movement that incorporates teachers as principal agents of change.

Janis Karklins, Assistant Director-General Communication and Information UNESCO

Considered in this way, media education can be seen as “citizenship education”. UNESCO has numerous initiatives to support media education and is currently working on a Global Alliance for media and information literacy. In Sweden, the UNESCO framework has been translated and is now used as the basis for drawing attention to media education.



sweden



Changes in the media environment have brought considerable benefits, but they have also brought with them a number of challenges both for democracy itself and for the quality of democracy.

Future of Sweden Commission, 2013

One of the most unusual kinds of material that you come across when you investigate media education in different countries is the fairytale. The Swedish Media Council [*Statens medieråd*] decided to commission a writer to produce one. The Media Council, which was set up in 2011, has a dual task where young media users are concerned, namely to *empower* and to protect. It was decided very early on that even pre-schoolers should also be reached. This resulted in *Sniff around the Net* [*Nosa på nätet*], a full-scale learning pathway that starts with a fairytale about *Super Researchers* [*Superundersökarna*]. After all, what better way is there of keeping children interested than a fairytale? The fairytale was written by Åsa Kronkvist – a teacher who had already been writing teaching materials for media literacy for a number of years – and aims to familiarise pre-schoolers with the critical use of sources and awareness when using media. That would seem a lot to ask, but with this the material it is possible.

The fairytale concerns a little fellow with big ears and little wings who jumps out from a screen and challenges the main character, Emma, to explore the world together. “I come from a famous family of super researchers,” he says, after leaping out of his virtual world and onto Emma’s screen. “Ever since I was little,” he says, “I’ve been trained to find out what things are all about. I’ve looked, sniffed, tasted, heard, tried out, felt, and tested. And now, I need *your* help, Emma, to find out what things are like here too.”

Initially, the material was distributed to infant schools that had expressed an interest. Soon, however, educators in Norway heard about the initiative and they decided to start using the whole lesson package, which was then translated and sent to *all* Norwegian kindergartens. This made Swedish educators realise what fantastic material it was, and in 2012 they too distributed the fairytale and the teaching material to all infant schools as part of a national campaign. A lot of use is still being made of the material and there are blogs where teachers discuss their experience of using it.

It’s hard to think of a better way of connecting with young children and inculcating a critical approach to investigating things that will benefit them for the rest of their life.

Rapid rise of digital technology

The importance that Sweden attaches to critical skills among young children shows that it is very much involved with this topic.

Peter Karlberg works for the *Swedish National Agency for Education* [*Skolverket*]. In a telephone interview, he told us that more and more one-to-one projects are being introduced, with every child being provided with a device. “It may be a laptop or an iPad,” he says. “In the past few years, more iPads or Android tablets have been bought than laptops. Schools decide on tablets because they are easy to use and relatively inexpensive. At upper secondary-school level, more than half of pupils have their own device.”

After Denmark, Sweden is the country with the highest spread of digital technology in schools, with 91% of teachers being able to use digital media during lessons. Peter Karlberg says that this creates a lot of uncertainty for teachers: “Quite apart from the devices at school, almost all Swedish children can go online at home, and the majority of them now have their own smartphone. They live in this ‘connected world’. So consumption of media is instant, continuous, and everywhere.



That's a major change. Schools need a lot of support to adapt to this new situation. And it's not always successful. A lot of teachers are very uncertain – they find it highly problematical that everything has gone so fast and can't be controlled. What constitutes ethical behaviour online? What is safe? Maths teachers, for example, are wondering how they ought to use the media in order to improve their lessons."

Like their Finnish colleagues, Swedish teachers have a great degree of freedom. In Sweden, it is the municipalities, schools, and teachers who decide what exactly will be taught and how. There is a (national) general curriculum, but it is only a guideline: it specifies educational objectives, but they are not worked out in detail. It is the municipalities that decide on the details. The first time pupils are tested is not until they are nine years old.

"We have a long tradition of freedom for teachers to select methods and materials themselves," says Peter Karlberg. Swedish teachers also do a lot as regards media education. "When we survey children," he explains, "most of them say that they do get this kind of teaching at school. But we don't know at what standard that teaching takes place, and we also don't know exactly who provide it. Sometimes it's library staff, and sometimes there are special lessons. Some lessons involve serious discussion of media. But when you look at how teachers use media pedagogically and didactically, then you see that skills are lacking. Basic teacher training programmes devote hardly any attention to this topic, so even good teachers have not been trained to work effectively with ICT. It therefore remains a major step for them to transform their own media knowledge and skills into a lesson activity and to get it across to the pupils."

Media literacy not in the curriculum

It doesn't help that media literacy is not explicitly included in the Swedish curriculum. If you look carefully, however, you can find references to the concept of media literacy, on the basis of the component parts (things like "evaluation of sources on various platforms"). Schools are also required to ensure that pupils "can use modern technology as a tool to acquire knowledge, to communicate, to develop creativity, and for learning in general". But media literacy as *such* is not mentioned.

That is the case throughout the curriculum. Under "exploring reality", for example, one finds:

Methods of searching for information from different sources: interviews, observations and measurements. How sources and information can be assessed and processed.

But that this requires media education is not stated. Martina Wagner, a representative of the *Swedish Media Council* – the government institute that also commissioned the fairytale – thinks that is a pity. "When we, as media literacy lovers, see those objectives," she says, "our response is 'Yes, that's it! We need to give children the means that they need in order to operate within the information society.' But a teacher who doesn't know this, wouldn't realise it."

Somebody who *does* realise it understands that references to media can be discovered mainly among the creative learning objectives. But those references are just "separate little islands" that are not clearly linked to the rest of the curriculum. Little attention is devoted to skills or education concerning the themes of "public" and "production".

The *Swedish Media Council* collects and distributes research findings, and makes teaching materials available to educationalists and teachers. But the fact that media education is not mandatory means that teachers are not actually obliged to use those materials. Martina Wagner would like



to communicate with teachers in a more systematic and consistent manner – at the moment they need to discover for themselves that media education is hidden away in the curriculum. “We now need to do it,” she says, “by relating the material to the national educational guidelines. We then tell teachers that they are obliged to comply. ‘Look,’ we say, ‘there it is in the guidelines.’ But you do need to be prepared to read those documents from that perspective, and that’s a problem for us.”

UNESCO and “The Commission on the Future”

“A lot of positive energy is now focussed on this topic, however,” says Martina Wagner. The Council is setting up a website to provide high-quality materials that teachers and media centre staff can use to supplement their lessons. The material is based on UNESCO’s media and information literacy framework.. Ms Wagner explains: “The Swedish adaptation of the UNESCO framework has become an extremely important document, and it’s also the starting point for our own work. UNESCO’s definition focuses on citizenship and human rights, on being involved in democratic society and making your voice heard.”

Martina Wagner believes that this is more important than ever. A special *Commission on the Future of Sweden* was recently set up to think long and hard about the opportunities and challenges of the future. One chapter of the commission’s fascinating report is devoted to *The changing media environment and its democratic challenges*.

“The basic principle,” says Ms Wagner, “is that people must have the skills they need to process information properly. The digital divide in Sweden is not between people who do or don’t have a computer but between people who can deal with the enormous daily flow of information and those who can’t. That is the challenge for the democratic society. The report by the Future Commission deals at length with the various realities within which we now live. Because nowadays it’s very easy: you can decide to acquire knowledge from a wide range of information or from a very small part of it on the basis of a small number of sources. That is a democratic problem and a challenge. We have found it very effective to discuss media and information literacy within that context.”

There is therefore also a lot of attention for media literacy. Martina Wagner explains: “We do work for the ministries of justice, culture, education, industry, and social services. They all want to ‘do something with media’. That enables us to carry out our wide-ranging mission effectively within various different partnerships. But the fact that there is no national school programme supervised by government means that we do not have any mandate to coordinate matters centrally.”

Film education

In Sweden, film is taught as part of mother tongue education, history, social sciences, and the arts. Many schools have after-school cultural programmes, with filmmaking as an optional subject. According to a study by the *British Film Institute*, 75% of all Swedish school pupils are involved with film in some way during their normal education.

These activities are supported by the *Swedish Film Institute Foundation*, a government body responsible for improving young people’s knowledge of film and encouraging their creativity. Up to 2014, the Foundation is in fact working according to an *Action Plan for Children and Young People*, with the intention of getting children to think critically about the media and teaching them how to interpret films.

Outside school, there are also all kinds of organisations that provide film education, for example the national film museum, film festivals, and art cinemas, but these are outside the remit of the present study (which focuses on media education at schools).



Plusses and Minuses

- + Use of the UNESCO Framework has unambiguously confirmed the importance of media education. Media education is associated with citizenship and the future of Swedish democracy.
- + In Sweden, media education is already linked to a critical, investigative attitude even when the children are still young; this is clearly apparent from the “Super Researchers” fairytale, which was distributed nationally.
- + Three quarters of Swedish children receive film education at school.
- The organisations involved do not know exactly to what extent media and information literacy is actually taught, and they have no mandate to require that it in fact be taught.
- Media literacy is hidden away in the curriculum. The term itself is not used anywhere, meaning that it is only teachers who are already interested in it who are aware of the need for good media education.
- For many teachers, the divide between using media during lessons and good education with and about the media is still too wide.

[Intermezzo] Nordic co-operation.

In October 2013, the *Nordic Council of Ministers* – a partnership of the Nordic countries – organised a conference in Stockholm on media and information literacy. This was the first meeting of its kind for the Nordic countries. The approach is based on the UNESCO framework in which media and information literacy is viewed as “a key to democracy and freedom of expression”. The organisers say that “Today citizens require many different skills to be able to understand, evaluate, use, and express themselves through media and other information channels. Children and young people are the ones most exposed to new media.”

Representatives of the Nordic countries have been invited to discuss a common perspective on this issue and a platform for greater co-operation and use of networks. The intention is for media and information literacy to be given a clearer position on the agenda. In the longer term, the initiators say that the expert meeting can bring about improved dialogue at European level. Prior to the meeting, the conclusions were presented of an overview study carried out by *Nordicom*, the knowledge centre based at the University of Gothenburg.

Those conclusions show that media and information literacy is on the political agenda in all the Nordic countries, but it is not equally prominent in all of them. The trends in the various countries as regards policy and curricula do have a lot in common. Ultimately, the conclusion is that the challenge is the same for all the Nordic countries:

The Nordic countries have a largely shared vision of democracy, the importance of an open and equal society and respect for the preferences and competencies of children and young people. This is the perspective that is largely being updated and in some respects even challenged by the development of the modern communications society.



the united kingdom



In many ways attention to media literacy seems to have a bright future, in education and in wider society, in the UK and in the world at large... [However,] further developments seem now both possible and urgent.

Andrew Burn & James Durran, 2007

The United Kingdom has a special position, globally speaking, as regards media literacy because “media studies” has been taught at British schools since the 1970s. This special optional subject is given at secondary schools for pupils aged 14 to 18. This long tradition means that schools and teachers have built up tremendous expertise in the field of media education over several decades. Good teaching materials are available.

It is not difficult to guess the downside of such a specialist tradition, however. Only a very small proportion of pupils are involved (about 7% according to an EU study). Pupils who do not choose media studies benefit far less from the extensive expertise that has been built up. That is not to say, however, that British children do not learn anything about the media. In fact, more than 70% of pupils in the 8 to 15 age group are taught about the Internet at school. Unfortunately, that figure naturally says very little about the content or quality of the lessons.

In a telephone interview, Andrew Burn – a leading UK expert on media education – spoke candidly about media education in that country. He is proud of the specialist tradition but at the same time sceptical about general media education.

“We have one of the longest traditions where media education is concerned. We have exams in media studies and teachers with a great deal of experience because this subject has been taught for decades now. When media studies was first taught here as a separate school subject, hardly any other countries were doing so. The courses concerned popular culture, specific media, the institutions within the media landscape, types of audiences, and the politics of representation. That constitutes an exceptional pedagogical and didactic tradition.”

Along with the development of these special school subjects, the traditional idea of “literacy” has been increasingly extended. There were already references to “game literacy” and “film literacy” quite a long time ago. The “literacy” tradition is therefore strongly represented, both in education and in academic research.

That is also apparent where film education is concerned. In the UK, this has been assigned higher priority than in the other countries covered by the present report. The government now and then supports large-scale national projects, but since June 2008 the UK has also had a national strategy for film education, implemented by the *British Film Institute* (BFI).

Film education in the UK is classified as part of the development of critical reading skills within the school subject *Literacy and English*. In addition to the BFI, the *Film Education* organisation produces teaching materials for use in schools. There are also a number of organisations involved in film production and after-school viewings. A quarter of the UK’s four million primary-school pupils are estimated to receive lessons about film. Teachers are not consistently trained to give such lessons, but there are lesson packages that can be used during lessons in English or modern languages.

However, this exceptional tradition of media studies does have a downside. Andrew Burn explains: “The government has never in fact given full support to media literacy. Nobody holds teachers to account if they do not deal with it in their lessons. If it is taught effectively, then the initiative comes from the teachers themselves. If you visit a school and find a teacher who is providing



serious media education, then it is because that particular school has a tradition of media literacy, and also a limited amount of good material. Media literacy does not receive any systematic attention during teacher training programmes.”

Like many other experts, Andrew Burn is extremely sceptical as regards the media literacy of “the average pupil”. That scepticism is supported by the available research. “The examination courses in media studies and film studies are successful,” he says. “A lot of pupils take those courses. But for younger pupils, media literacy is simply part of the teaching of English, i.e. ‘mother tongue education’, as in many other countries.” Most references to media literacy in the English curriculum are therefore classified under the heading “Mother Tongue”. There are also references to digital media in the school subjects *Arts & Design and Music*.

Because coordination by the government is inconsistent, integration of media literacy is in practice lagging behind the curriculum targets. And there is no single government body that focuses entirely on coordinating media education, as there is in Sweden or the Netherlands.

In 2004, a wide-ranging research programme was initiated, with a conference organised by the Minister of Culture, Media & Sport and entitled *Inform and Empower: Media Literacy in the 21st Century*.

For a few years, there was also investment in creating media education networks, but the programme came to an end in 2008. The government has referred to media education as “a good thing” but it has not provided consistent support. According to Andrew Burn, “What you always see is that it disappears when there is a Conservative government and that it reappears when the Labour Party is in power. At the moment – under the current (2013) Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition – the curriculum is being rewritten and the media element has virtually disappeared.”

This tendency for different political groupings to value media literacy differently has frequently been noted, including in countries other than the UK. The result is inconsistent government funding and support for media education, meaning that organisations and projects that depend on such funding can find themselves in difficulty; they may also seek a solution by entering into commercial alliances, which are sometimes at the expense of actual content.

Under such circumstances, the less obvious creative aspects of media literacy quickly fade into the background. “There are various organisations that are attempting to do something about media literacy,” says Andrew Burn, “but they fall under different ministries. What you often see is that there are no effective links between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture. Little emphasis is placed on the cultural aspect of media education, and the organisations that are involved with that aspect have hardly any effect on media literacy programmes at schools.”

Andrew Burn realises that this is not a uniquely British situation: “Media education is always a marginalised subject, and it is always at risk of disappearing from the curriculum. In countries with a national curriculum, such as the UK, the primary focus is on the basics. There are therefore strict rules as regards mother tongue teaching and maths. Then there’s a bit of physical education and perhaps even something about ICT and computers, but no media literacy. The curriculum also contains some arts and culture subjects, but the programmes are often optional. Media literacy comes last of all.”



Focus on safety

The UK has a strong tradition in teaching ICT. The government has invested significantly in the integration of digital technology (ICT) into education. Learning objectives in the field of ICT are interwoven throughout the curriculum, with the main focus being on practical skills. In this context, however, the approach adopted with “media education” is often a defensive one. One example are the websites of the *Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre*, which are maintained under the heading *Think U Know* (thinkuknow.uk). These sites dealing with Internet safety have been created for parents and children in various different age groups; they include games such as *Hector’s World* that make children playfully aware of the dangers on the Web.

The result of this defensive focus on ICT is apparent from various surveys. A study in the context of *EU Kids Online*, carried out by the *London School of Economics and Political Science*, shows that British parents are among the most protective in Europe. They make great efforts to eliminate online risks. However, they go so far in imposing restrictions that they also restrict their children’s online opportunities. The defensive approach of parents means that 80% of British children are “well protected” but at the same time their online opportunities are restricted. In Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden, parents generally allow their children greater online freedom: they allow more but they still remain involved with their children’s use of media.

It should be noted that the focus on ICT (and safety) does not mean that it is actually dealt with in practice. A report by the authoritative *Royal Society* has concluded that many of the objectives for ICT education that are set in the curriculum are not in fact addressed in actual practice. Another study found that the focus on ICT is primarily instrumental, meaning that little attention is devoted to critical skills or the connection between ICT and media.

Confusion

Moreover, in the UK – more than in the other countries covered by this study – it is not clear what media education should actually involve. The terms “digital literacy” and “media literacy” are used interchangeably in discussions about media education, adding confusion to the education’s purposes.

“There is a great deal of confusion particularly about the term ‘digital literacy’,” says Andrew Burn. “It often involves practical skills – whether children can use software and so forth. Programming is becoming more important, for example. That’s a good development, but it has little to do with media literacy. And the creative aspect is disappearing even further into the background.”

The risk associated with digital literacy is that of an approach to media education that is too instrumental. As we shall see below, that is a risk that also applies in the Netherlands. According to David Buckingham of the *Institute of Education* at the University of London, the confusion about the relevant terms is highly undesirable:

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.

David Buckingham is speaking here about the European situation, but he is also clearly referring to the UK. Indeed, the focus on ICT in the UK seems to hamper the broader development of media literacy. It was already noted in a profile of media education in the UK in 2007 that:



[There] is a marked contrast between the importance that has been placed on the integration of ICT into society (in education as well as in other sectors) and the lack of priority given to the mass media and to an integral vision of media literacy. That means that Media literacy – on the whole – is not a high priority for any sector of the UK government.

Nevertheless, in 2003 a single body was given responsibility for media literacy in the United Kingdom. *Ofcom*, the national regulator for radio and television, has the obligation to promote media literacy by researching it and by supporting the development of learning resources and methods. *Ofcom* has also produced an official definition of media literacy, namely *the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts*. This definition is not as broad as that applied by the EU or UNESCO, for example, but it does represent progress towards a broad approach.

Significant initiatives

Even though media literacy does not yet dominate at UK schools, there are in fact interesting initiatives that stand out from the rest. In addition to the specialist secondary-school courses already referred to, for example, there is the *Centre for the Study of Youth and Media*. For a number of years now, the Centre has carried out pioneering research and put forward ideas, particularly regarding the Internet and games. One resulting initiative is DARE, to which Andrew Burn (see above) is affiliated. This is a research partnership that focuses on the digital arts in education. Pupils have, for example, developed game scenarios on the basis of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The scope of these initiatives is only small, however.

The English tradition of film education touches on a broader development of media literacy. The *UK Film Council*, for example, has produced a *Charter for Media Literacy and First Light Movies* supports the production of films by young people. A number of broadcasting organisations are also involved in promoting media literacy. In particular, the BBC's *Beyond the Broadcast* organisation – which enables school pupils to make news themselves – reaches a large number of young people.

Plusses and Minuses

- + The United Kingdom has a specialised pedagogical-didactic tradition in media studies, built up since the 1970s.
- + British academia devotes great attention to a broad concept of *literacy* (even though that is not widely applied at schools).
- + The UK has a long tradition of film literacy; this is supported by the government and also generates broader media literacy initiatives.
- The strong focus on ICT skills and digital literacy is at the cost of a broader concept of media literacy.
- The attitude regarding digital literacy – and thus media education in general – is predominantly defensive.
- Government support for media literacy in education is very variable and seldom solid.

[Intermezzo] Media literacy as a human right

One of the biggest misconceptions about media education is the impression among some parents and educators that children themselves know best how to deal with new technologies – after all, just look at the incredible ease with which they use those tablets and smartphones! But that is not to say – by any means – that children also understand what exactly they are doing, what information they are taking on board, and how they can master the device that they are using. Somebody who uses Google, for example, doesn't know automatically how the search engine works. Many teachers say that children do not have the necessary knowledge to deal critically with the media in their lives. This is why media education is necessary.



Nevertheless, media education is often still seen as a luxury – the assumption is that if children are good at reading, writing, and arithmetic then the rest will follow automatically. But in reality, media literacy is something much more fundamental than that, as UNESCO makes clear:

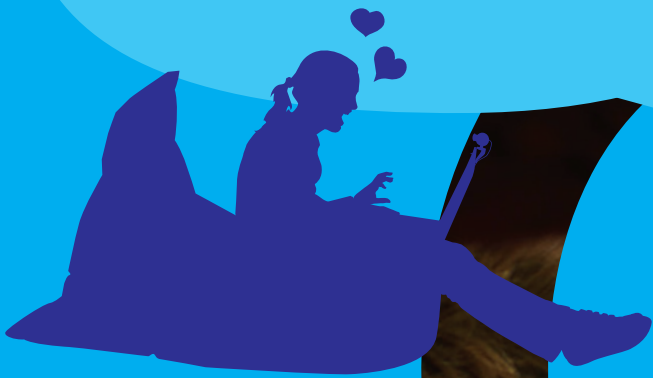
Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” Media and information literacy (MIL) equips citizens with competencies needed to seek and enjoy the full benefits of this fundamental human right.

Seen in this way, media literacy is directly related to the rights of every individual. It is therefore not only important in relation to “citizenship” but also so as to facilitate creative development, for play, participation, and familiarity with other cultures (diversity).

This framework can provide a solution for experts who are struggling to convince others of the importance of media literacy. Media literacy is part of the well-being, protection, and development of every child. Nobody will disagree with this, but the risk inherent in such an interpretation is that the actual matter concerned – media literacy – will become lost in praiseworthy but abstract objectives. The challenge for policy-makers, experts, and teachers is therefore to steer a fine course between the too instrumental and too abstract definitions of media literacy.



netherlands



“Someone who is not media-literate, will become excluded.”

Ronald Plasterk, Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science, 2007

Countless initiatives have been organised in the Netherlands to help children in some way or other to deal with the media. Media education has been on the agenda for decades but media literacy is not included as a separate objective in the detailed national curriculum drawn up by the Dutch government. It is therefore not compulsory, and at the great majority of schools media literacy is not a separate subject. On the instructions of the government, the *Mediawijzer.net* expertise centre has been coordinating media education in the Netherlands since 2008. This is a network organisation that brings together 800 separate organisations. The main partners are from the country’s education sector, public broadcasters, and libraries.

Where does Dutch media education come from? In 2005, the best media education in the Netherlands was still “the result of years of dedication and enthusiasm on the part of individual teachers and of a broader view of matters by individual school managements”. These players were constantly reinventing the wheel. A survey in 2008 found that there were more than 200 initiatives in the field of media literacy. Most of these focused on “responsible consumption” of media content. The survey also discovered that many media literacy activities had still not been coordinated with one another. This meant that the synergy that can be derived from coordinating numerous campaigns and activities was not yet being fully exploited.

The majority of secondary-school teachers say that media literacy is in fact dealt with at their school. In 2009, 77% of them said that they devoted attention to it. According to the teachers, if media education is included within a particular subject, then it is IT and information science, ICT lessons, social studies, culture & the arts, and languages. Numerous NGOs also provide media education.

Digital Playground, for example, has been promoting media literacy among young people since 1998. Its lesson package focuses on arousing creativity, collaboration, and the ability to form judgments. It consists of an educational tool – *the Webwalk* – and a workshop. Other noteworthy initiatives include:

- *Codename Future*, an organisation that aims to prepare young people for an active role in society by means of up-to-the-minute interactive projects;
- *MediaMasters*, a game – repeated annually – in which children can create content themselves;
- *Mediacultuur.net*, where secondary-school pupils can produce genre films and remix the news.

Coordination needed

There are in fact hundreds of organisations that produce teaching materials and courses. Experts have therefore long felt that there has been merely a “scattershot approach”, in other words that media education is provided with good intentions but without any coordination, and that it is not always effective.

According to Mary Berkhout, programme manager for *Mediawijzer.net*, “Things have become extremely fragmented over the past ten years. The successive hypes and the numerous different target groups within education, combined with the diverse funding options, have led to more and more new initiatives being set up. There was nothing wrong with that, but people in education it was confusing because you don’t know how good or bad all that new material is, you don’t know whether proper consideration has been given to it, or how it links up with existing educational practice. When the *Expertise Centre for Media Literacy* [*Mediawijzsheid Expertisecentrum*] was set up, a decision was therefore taken to only have material developed where there were genuine



shortcomings and to otherwise focus on the targeted provision of existing material to the various different groups. Our intention was to put an end to the fragmentation and to coordinate supply and demand more effectively.”

This approach sounds like a success story, although no concrete results are yet apparent at school level. A coordinated approach was necessary in order to embed media education within the day-to-day practice of education. According to Mary Berkhout, that would work best if it were made obligatory: “We already concluded at an early stage that the preference was for matters to be based on legislation. But that would take a long time, and you don’t necessarily have to wait for legislation to be introduced – you can already take steps now. We are continuing to press for such legislation, but in the meantime we are also working in the Netherlands on a step-by-step plan for each school level so as to really give a boost to media education.”

They adopted a structured approach. “We first produced an extremely clear definition of media literacy,” says Ms Berkhout, “briefly ‘the collection of competencies that you need to take an active and deliberate part in the media society’. We then constantly refined that definition and then divided it up into different levels for different target groups. It all only works if you operate on the basis of a shared theoretical framework.”

That shared framework came in the form of the “competencies model” that distinguished between competencies as regards understanding, use, communication, and strategy. The model can be summarised in a small diagram, but it nevertheless comprises all the different facets of media literacy.

Mary Berkhout explains: “We started with primary education. We first commissioned an analysis of all the existing media literacy learning pathways and methods used at primary schools. The research firm that carried out the analysis in 2013 surveyed dozens of different learning pathways. In each case, it looked at which skills were taught within a given programme and which were not. This produced a detailed overview of the existing material, the most comprehensive methods, and the most useful methods. The survey showed that all the competencies in the ‘media literacy competencies model’ were in fact being taught, but that not a single method incorporated all of them. As in 2009, most of the initiatives focused on communication and on finding and processing information. There were also only a few methods that devoted attention to the strategic aspects of media literacy (i.e. the use of media to achieve objectives). The survey of student teachers showed that there was still a great need for more training because not one of the teacher-training programmes dealt with all the different competencies.

With this analysis at its disposal, *Mediawijzer.net* could take the next step. “We had decided that the best possible way of coordinating supply and demand was by means of a ‘learning resources bank’. This is an online location where material is made available for each level. We invited the organisations within our network to put forward proposals for a learning resources bank of this kind, and established an incentives scheme for primary education, i.e. for the youngest children. Work is currently going on to set up three online learning resources banks:

- one with resources for primary-school pupils;
- one for refresher training for primary-school teachers; and
- one for student teachers.

We are making sure that the best material is easily accessible for all those target groups. At the same time, the resources can always be linked back to the key objectives and to the competencies. We hope that all this will boost the quality of media education.”



Few EU countries have advanced as far as the Netherlands in developing a single model that works out all the various competencies at different educational levels. Even so, the basic research is by no means complete.

Amongst his other concerns, Hans van Driel, a senior lecturer at Tilburg University, works on media education. He praises the theoretical framework that *Mediawijzer.net* has introduced, but he thinks that more needs to be done in the way of basic research. “We need to do a lot more theory development,” he says. “How do people develop habits? How exactly do they use media and how do they learn or unlearn certain ways of doing things? If we did more research on such matters and correlated the insights gained with media addiction, for example, then we would really be able to understand how the media impact on our daily lives.” That would also make clearer what constitutes effective media education, and why.

Step-by-step plan

But as long as media education is not compulsory, it will need to be presented attractively, with the emphasis not therefore being on basic research. An important part of the work of media education organisations consists of providing information and getting people enthusiastic. Last year (2012), *Mediawijzer.net* therefore published the *Media Literacy Book* [*Mediawijzer-boek*], an annual survey of trends and developments in media literacy aimed at professionals and interested parents.

One of the first initiatives to give media literacy a place in education came from the *My Child Online Foundation* [*Stichting Mijn Kind Online*], the organisation that commissioned the present study. With the *Handbook for Media Literacy at School* [*Handboek mediawijjsheid op school*], the Foundation has provided teachers with practical guidelines and the necessary background information. *My Child Online* is now working on a new version that will offer teachers guidelines for integrating media literacy education into their school’s curriculum. The new handbook provides a general step-by-step plan, a well-informed set of suggestions to help schools integrate media education. The approach adopted is a very serious one. Schools are called upon, for example, to first reflect on their overall strategy and objective: “How do we as a school see media literacy in the education we provide, and what do we wish to achieve?” If questions like this are not debated, media education will never be able to develop into a broadly supported component of standard educational practice. The new publication gives a step-by-step description of how media education can be integrated, with reference being made to the learning resources banks and learning pathways that are already available.

Media coaches

Another attempt to entrench media education at schools more effectively involves the appointment of media coaches. These operate at both primary and secondary schools. The intention is for the media coach to be like a “spider at the centre of the web”, coordinating the school’s media education and ensuring that optimum use is made of all the available know-how.

The *Handbook for Media Literacy at School* produced by *My Child Online* defines the media coach as “someone who assumes responsibility for a school’s media policy, assisting and guiding the subject teachers, organising media projects and parents’ evenings, and staying in touch with parties outside the school”. The European Commission has designated the appointment of a media coach as a best practice for organising media education.

The Netherlands now has two programmes to train media coaches. These are intended for primary and secondary-school teachers and for the staff of libraries, media centres, and juvenile welfare organisations. The country currently has between 600 and 1000 people who refer to themselves as media coaches.



Parallel discussions

The discourse in the Netherlands in this field usually focuses on the concept of “media literacy”. It is striking, however, that a report published by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) has argued for a new kind of “informatics” (ICT education) and introduced the term “digital literacy”. The researchers conclude that “despite the obvious need to educate Dutch school pupils as digitally literate citizens of the world, the Dutch education system does not provide for this to be done”.

In the light of the Academy’s report, discussion began again of the position of ICT in education. The question now being asked in the Netherlands – as in the UK – is what the relationship is between digital literacy and media literacy. Research is also taking place, at the behest of the Dutch government, into how far these subjects should form an obligatory part of the school curriculum.

It is, on the one hand, a good thing that the Academy’s report has rekindled interest in these questions. On the other, however, it is noticeable that this whole cycle of “bringing up for discussion” and “researching” is now taking place from the perspective of digital literacy, whereas this has already been taking place for many years from that of media literacy. This creates the impression that parallel discussions are taking place and that the wheel must once more be invented, whereas the biggest challenge currently facing media education is not a lack of knowledge but a lack of *implementation*. Despite the coordination activities of *Mediawijzer.net* and other organisations, it has seemingly not yet been possible to bridge the divide between politics, research, and implementation in education.

One additional risk as regards the Dutch situation is that the renewed, instrumental focus on “digital literacy” will ultimately be at the expense of the broad concept of “media literacy”, as would appear to have happened in the UK. In the next few years, organisations that adopt a media literacy approach will need to demonstrate that their activities and ideas cannot simply be reduced to merely the status of ICT education. If they do not succeed in doing so, then their right to exist and their entitlement to government funding will be at risk.

Film education

The Netherlands has hardly any tradition of film education in the context of normal education. The government does not have any strategy for film education, but it does provide funding to support initiatives from within civil society. Schools can decide for themselves whether and how to devote attention to film, with a few offering it as a separate subject. According to a study in 2012, only 5% of Dutch school pupils regularly and deliberately study “film” at school.

Film education in the Netherlands is coordinated by the *EYE Film Institute* in Amsterdam, which itself has a long tradition in the field of film education. One important initiative is *Cinekid*, which began as a film festival for children but which has developed into a permanent organisation that attempts to key in to the major “need for knowledge generation, transfer of expertise, product development, and education.” *Cinekid* presents the annual *New Media Awards* for creative initiatives in the area of film, games, and other digital media.

Media literacy schools

Thorbecke College, a secondary school in Zwolle, is one of the few Dutch schools to devote systematic attention to media literacy. In 2008–2009, it began offering an optional programme in “Modern Media” for pupils in the lower age group. The explicit aim is to promote media literacy, in other words to inculcate the knowledge, attitude, and skills that pupils need for life in the 21st century. Pupils gain information skills and strategic skills through practice at producing and



searching out journalistic material. They study and analyse films, and teachers also use films in such subjects as economics, history, and modern languages. There is also a specially constructed studio where students learn about media art, social media, and media production. The subject is taught by teachers who had already specialised in this field or who have undertaken in-service training.

This unique project has been copied by other schools, and six schools have now joined the *Media Literacy Schools Foundation* [*Stichting mediawijsheidsscholen*]. They represent the highest level of structured media education in the Netherlands because they not only teach *about* the media but also provide a great deal of scope for actual production. The majority of schools have not yet reached that stage, partly because they are not obligated to do so.

Plusses and Minuses

- + The main organisations in the Netherlands work together to integrate media education at schools in a structured manner, and based on a well-grounded theoretical framework. This centralised approach to organisation is still lacking in many other countries.
- + Attempts are being made to guarantee the continuity of media education with the aid of step-by-step plans and media coaches.
- + Learning resources banks are being set up so as to exchange material.
- Years of investment in education on the basis of the term “media literacy” have not been able to prevent a parallel discussion now taking place regarding the term “digital literacy”.
- Centralised organisation based on “media literacy” is not as yet generating results. There is still a great deal of fragmentation as regards learning resources and organisations.
- Because media education has to be appealing and “fun”, little attention is devoted to basic research on media literacy.

[Intermezzo] Steve Jobs Schools

There is a great deal of discussion in the Netherlands about media at school. In particular, the “Steve Jobs Schools” have become the subject of heated debate. These schools are called after the founder of Apple Inc, and are the result of an initiative by Maurice de Hond, a well-known Dutch pollster and public figure. During a conversation with a member of Amsterdam’s Municipal Executive, De Hond mentioned that he was considering homeschooling one of his children so that he could make full use of the latest technology, specifically the iPad. His daughter had already played with a rattle app on his iPhone when she was still in her cot, and she had since grown up with modern technology. De Hond was looking for a school that could provide what he wanted, but he found that mainstream schools were too old-fashioned in this regard. The Executive member then suggested that De Hond set up a new school himself.

De Hond followed his advice, and in August 2009 seven new primary schools opened where children are taught with iPads. Every pupil is issued with an iPad, which he or she can take home. Assignments can therefore be performed at school or at home, leading to major changes in the role of the teacher and making school hours much more flexible. The new schools have a physical playground but also a virtual one – *sCool/Space* – where pupils can create their own avatar. All in all, the Steve Jobs Schools are viewed as an opportunity for a new kind of education and also as a means of giving children who did not have a tablet at home the opportunity to work with one.

However, discussion of the use of tablets during lessons has stirred up considerable controversy. Are they a means or an end? Don’t they just encourage children to play games? And just how good are the “educational” apps – are they in fact as good as old-fashioned but reliable textbooks?



The Steve Jobs Schools have also generated some fierce responses. In Rotterdam, for example, the headmaster at one secondary school has got rid of *all* the computers. He calls the rapid digitisation of education “ill-considered” and even refers to “handing over children to computers” as “criminal”.

Extreme responses such as this – from iPad schools to schools with no computers at all – indicate the fierceness of the debate, which – it should be noted – has been polarised mainly by the media themselves due to their tendentious reporting.



analysis



National policies will be necessary to ensure the systematic and progressive inclusion of media- and information literacy at all levels of education systems. An understanding of national education policies...and their intersection with media and information literacy policies should be the starting point.

UNESCO, Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers, 2011

Shared problems

Media education is a hot topic in all the countries we surveyed, but development of the subject is only progressing slowly. That is not surprising. The changes in the media landscape have been extremely rapid and have affected the way we communicate, find out about the world, and participate as citizens within society. It goes without saying that the education sector is lagging behind this development, and that it will take several decades before it succeeds in effectively inculcating the new skills that are needed.

But there is no lack of enthusiasm among those directly involved in education. There is a great deal of discussion of media literacy, and many thousands of pages have been filled writing about it. Nevertheless, those thousands of pages seldom have any direct impact as regards the work actually taking place in classrooms. One important question is therefore how the experts involved can more effectively reach the children whom they wish to make media literate. One possible solution would be for media literacy experts who are involved in media education at policy-making level to also actually teach at schools (which does already happen in some cases). This would radically reduce the disparity between theory and practice.

One recurring problem in media education is a lack of continuity. Many organisations work on an ad hoc or project basis, meaning that the groups reached are those that were already interested anyway, or that were already working towards media literacy. The many initiatives are producing an abundance of material, but it is difficult to determine the quality of that material. Many countries are attempting to coordinate and organise matters centrally, but in practice this still leaves much to be desired. Surveying the field produces a varied picture.

In the first place, there is disagreement as to what exactly media literacy involves. Different countries accentuate different aspects. Teachers are not all convinced of the need to provide media education, they are busy enough already, and they are sometimes also uncertain about their own skills. They see their pupils making easy use of digital media and they assume – often incorrectly – that they don't need to learn anything about how to do so. Media literacy training for teachers is also a recurring problem.

It is also very difficult to determine who actually “owns” media education. Who is responsible for making children media literate? In the countries that we surveyed, there are often a number of different ministries involved, meaning that there is no single government body that coordinates matters. Policy-making often takes place at various different levels. In Finland and Sweden, for example, both national and local government are involved in deciding what is taught.

Where media literacy is included in the national curriculum, it is difficult to determine precisely *where* and *how well* it is taught. It is often dealt with a little bit all over the place: in the context of IT (in the ICT lessons), in the teaching of creative subjects, during mother tongue education, and in social-studies subjects such as history. This fragmentation is logical, but it is also a problem. It makes media literacy teaching dependent on the good will of individual schools and teachers, who already have a very full range of duties. Because most European countries – including those we



surveyed – are attempting to integrate media education into other school subjects via “cross-curricular” objectives, it is difficult to determine the extent to which this is successful. The specialised courses offered at some schools often reach only a limited number of pupils. Schools and teachers that wish to devote less attention to media literacy are not normally required to explain why.

One reason for this is that media education is often still seen as “a luxury” – as a kind of supplement to “the really important subjects”. As the present report shows, that is mistaken, but it does indicate a fundamental problem, namely the lack of autonomy of media education. In addition to the ad hoc initiatives of the organisations and teachers involved, the situation is also determined by government funding. Important organisations and learning pathways are in fact dependent on politics and hypes as regards the scope they are given, both financially and where policy is concerned. Governments increasingly believe that media literacy organisations should finance themselves, at least partially. As a result, organisations involved in media education are increasingly susceptible to commercial influences.

Commercial parties are only too happy to collaborate in promoting media literacy, but they have different priorities to those of experts, policymakers, and teachers. The risk here is that a relatively large amount of attention will be devoted to the “easy pickings” or to minor issues that are comprehensible but not necessarily important. It is easier to develop and sell a lesson package about digital harassment, for example, than one about critical use of online resources.

Strengths

The main question explored in his study was “What can countries learn from one another?” Let us therefore consider the strengths of each country.

The strength of Finland is to be found in its teachers. They are highly respected, and they have at least a Master’s degree. This is one reason why Finland scores so well in international comparisons. The country’s outstanding teachers mean that it also provides high-quality media education. It is important that the teacher is ultimately “the boss”, and is accepted and respected by all concerned. He or she is the expert where pedagogy and didactics are concerned, and is also dealt with as such. In Finland, it is not civil servants or NGOs that specify what constitutes good media education because in practice it is up to the teacher to decide. In the case of Finland, it is possible to give a clear answer to the question “who actually ‘owns’ media education?”

The strength of Sweden is the country’s focus on developing a critical attitude, something that is taught even when children are still very young. The most obvious example of this is the *Super Researchers* fairytale – a unique and successful campaign to familiarise all pre-schoolers with the concept of the critical use of sources and awareness when using media. In addition, Sweden deals with *media and information literacy* on the basis of the framework developed by UNESCO. The emphasis on citizenship and human rights is inspiring because it unambiguously confirms the importance of media education. The Swedish approach can be an inspirational example for countries struggling to affirm media literacy's relevance.

The strength of the United Kingdom is to be found in its long tradition of *media studies*. Since as far back as the 1970s, UK schools and teachers have been developing courses specifically on media. These deal with critical use of the media, media institutions, and also production. Not all British pupils take this subject, but the fact that the country has such a tradition – with the concept of “literacy” being interpreted broadly and constantly rediscovered – is of great value. The tradition that the UK has built up as regards film education – and which is also supported by government – is inspiring.



Finland, Sweden, and the UK all have a national curriculum, meaning that school administrators and teachers have a great deal of leeway in determining the actual content of lessons. They are less tied to specific objectives than in countries with detailed and sometimes obligatory learning pathways, for example the Netherlands. As a result, they have the scope within their own educational practice to freely go in search of ways of providing and integrating media education.

The strength of the Netherlands is the way it attempts to integrate media education at schools in a structured manner, and based on a well-grounded theoretical framework. The main organisations involved are collaborating to develop “learning resources banks” within which high-quality learning pathways are categorised and made available. These learning resources banks comprise materials intended for regular teachers, student teachers, and in-service training. The step-by-step plans that are developed in order to integrate media education in a structured manner are useful, as are the “media coaches” who are trained to take responsibility for coordinating media education at a school or library. All in all, the combined initiatives offer the prospect of systematic, high-quality media education, without the curriculum being revised for that purpose.

The strength of almost all these countries – but to a lesser extent of the UK – is their positive and proactive approach to media education, with the focus being less on safety and protection than on creativity and empowerment. Within Europe, the defensive attitude towards media – which considers them to be “nasty and threatening” – is becoming a thing of the past, as is apparent from the curricula. Individual instructors naturally have their own attitude, but there is an unmistakable reduction in the amount of attention paid to safety and protection.

Another very positive development at European level is the advent of informal networks of media literacy professionals who meet increasingly frequently and exchange practices and ideas. The present report is a product of that development. Although it is still too early to speak of a real convergence of media education in different countries, the first steps in that direction have in fact been taken.

Weaknesses

- Even in Finland – that educational paradise – teachers are not systematically trained as regards media literacy.
- In Finland, Sweden, and the UK, the position of media literacy is an uncertain one. Those who do not want to be involved do not need to be. That is the downside of the leeway offered by the curriculum.
- The coordinated approach that is being developed in the Netherlands is still at a very early stage and depends on the vagaries of politics and those directly concerned with education, with numerous organisations attempting to claim a pioneering role. If the main organisations are the subject of cutbacks, then major ambitions may be put at risk.
- The biggest problem of the British tradition is that it reaches only a relatively small number of pupils.

The ideal media education country

In an ideal media education country, media education would be taught by outstanding teachers, as in Finland. The country would have a long tradition of *media studies*, as in the UK. There would be a focus on inculcating critical skills from an early age, as in Sweden. And the teaching materials would be catalogued and made available centrally and on the basis of a single theoretical framework, as in the Netherlands. Wouldn't we all like to live in such a country!



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- Sally Reynolds (Medea project);
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