

Background Working Paper

Meta-analysis of reviews on media literacy and media studies

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1. Introduction

In a special issue on media literacy published in the *Journal of Communication* in 1998, the editor Alan Rubin starts by wondering, 'For several decades we have been debating issues surrounding media literacy. It is somewhat perplexing why we really understand so little about the subject.' (1998:3). Although the literature on media literacy, more recently described as digital literacy, has increased tremendously, and more about this subject is now understood, it is fair to say that we still struggle for a coherent understanding of the term 'media literacy' (Tyner, 2010).

Media literacy is often defined within the broader concepts of mediatisation, globalisation, and commercialisation and linked to developments of the information and knowledge society. The overall question is: What is needed in order to be a literate person in the 21st century? And how do cultural practices such as 'reading' and 'writing' change due to the increased use of digital media? Traditionally, media literacy has been closely linked to education and concerns about how children and young people relate to media content. However, in recent years, this term has become broader in scope and approach, involving other traditions and perspectives within media and communication research. Of course, this broader interest in media literacy is connected to media developments during the last couple of decades, and the cultural and social implications of these developments.

This working paper is a meta-analysis of existing reviews on media literacy. The primary focus is on initiatives within Europe, but other country and regional initiatives will also be included. It is also important to emphasize that the presentation and discussion of these reviews will be related to issues of importance for media studies and not as highlighted within educational sciences. Even though different areas of media research could be related to 'media literacy', we do not define this as our task in this paper. This paper will highlight the core research and policy issues of 'media literacy'. Further, this paper does not attempt to synthesise the whole field of media literacy; rather, it aims to give an overview based on existing reviews and publication as a starting point for further discussions within the workshops of the Forward Look on 'Media studies: new media and new literacies'.

The presentation consists of two main parts. In the first part, a summary of terminology, definitions and positionings within the field of media literacy is presented. This part ends with a conceptual framework on media literacy. The second part consists of a discussion of different concepts and issues, within both research and policy, concerning media literacy

within the literature, divided into three sub-sections indicating different target levels on which media literacy has been focused. However, first a few words on our approach.

2. Creating an overview – our approach

In our search for and collection of relevant reviews on media literacy, it has become evident that these reviews were created with different purposes – some are more policy oriented, some are oriented towards practice and some are more clearly defined as research reviews. Accordingly, we tried to group the reviews together according to their purpose, and then analysed the reviews for key issues and ways of presenting these issues. In addition, we have included what might be termed as ‘meta-texts’, which are either articles with a special focus on media literacy, as part of special issues of journals, or books and reports that are comments on the field of ‘media literacy’ as such. To support us in this work, we developed a conceptual model of key concepts and research orientations we came across in the literature.

Some initiatives and reviews became more central than others, because they brought together different strands of research and combine policy and research in recent years. One example is the ‘EuroMeduc’ report from 2009, which is ‘a European exchange network for media literacy’. Different projects and initiatives have been important in addressing issues of ‘media literacy’, such as the studies ‘Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe’ (Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona, 2007) and ‘Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy levels in Europe’ (Danish Technological Institute 2010) (see also http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/literacy/index_en.htm).

In a meta-review like this one, we need to make some distinctions on what we will *not* include. First, we define our task to address ‘media literacy’ according to the outline of the Forward Look on Media Studies, and not about media education. ‘Media literacy education’ is included in parts of the discussion below, when we see that it is relevant. Second, we do not include the massive amount of literature and studies concerning ‘digital literacy’ published in later years, especially concerning the literature on ways of measuring ‘digital literacy’ among young people, understood as how competent they are in using computers and navigating the Internet. However, we will include aspects of ‘digital literacy’ as ways that the field of ‘media literacy’ is progressing due to the impact of digital media on our culture and societies.

3. Terminology, Definitions and Positioning

Before we discuss the core issues of reviews on media literacy, we want to briefly introduce the terminology, different definitions and historic positionings used in this field. This will give some input to further discussions and the core issues.

Terminology

In the previously mentioned special issue of the *Journal of Communication* from 1998, James A. Brown argues that 'The term media literacy means many things to many people. Traditionally, it has involved the ability to analyze and appreciate respected works of literature and, by extension, to communicate effectively by writing well. In the past half-century it has come to include the ability to analyze competently and to utilize skilfully print journalism, cinematic productions, radio and television programming, and even computer-mediated information and exchange (including real-time interactive exploration through the global internet).' (1998:44). This was written at a time when digital media were still in the beginning phase of major transitions. However, we are still relating to many media, both analogue and digital, and as such 'media literacy' covers many different media with different ways of representation.

The development of media education has influenced the term 'media literacy' in many countries, most explicitly in the UK, from the 1970s onwards. Media literacy became a key term in ways of targeting media education inside and outside of schools. Towards the end of the 1990s, media literacy became connected to the term 'digital literacy' (Gilster 1997), which has become the most commonly used term. The reason is of course the impact of digital media and a need to rhetorically raise issues of ways of handling the technological development and the role of education in our society.

In his critical comment on the terminology used, and the policy initiatives within the EU during the last decade, D. Buckingham identifies the two different traditions related to 'media literacy' and 'digital literacy';

Media literacy, it seems, is a skill or a form of competency; but it is also about critical thinking, and about cultural dispositions or tastes. It is about old media and new media, about books and mobile phones. It is for young and old, for teachers and parents, for people who work in the media industries and for NGOs. It happens in schools and in homes, and indeed in the media themselves. It is an initiative coming from the top down, but also from the bottom up. In these kinds of texts, media literacy is also often aligned with other contemporary "buzzwords" in educational and social policy. It is about creativity, citizenship, empowerment,

inclusion, personalisation, innovation, critical thinking... and the list goes on. ... But therein lies the problem. ...it is a form of policy marketing-speak: it is about selling media literacy on the back of a whole series of other desirable commodities. ...If media literacy is essentially a regulatory initiative, digital literacy is primarily about inclusion. In the documents, digital literacy is frequently defined as a “life skill” —a form of individual technological competence that is a prerequisite for full participation in society. If you lack the skills, you are by definition disadvantaged. (Buckingham, 2009: 13-17).

There is obvious truth to these conceptual reflections by Buckingham. ‘Media’ and ‘digital’ literacies have evolved from different traditions, with the first more closely linked within media studies, while the second is more closely linked to informatics and technology developments. Still, these two terms have more similarities than differences in the issues raised, and in that they are just a reflection on media developments, especially on convergence. Consequently, terms such as ‘computer literacy’, ‘ICT literacy’ and ‘Internet literacy’ are more closely linked to instrumental and narrow conceptions of the interconnection between media and literacy, understood mainly as skills in handling the technology. The similarities between ‘media literacy’ and ‘digital literacy’ can be seen in publications such as the popularized version by P. Gilster (1997), different perspectives presented by Lankshear and Knobel (2008) or in research and policy initiatives in the Nordic countries (see the Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy).

In the German language discourse, the term ‘media competence’ receives far more attention than ‘media literacy’ (Baacke, 1996). Similar emphasis on media competence rather than media literacy can be found in the Nordic countries (Lankshear & Knobel 2008). The word formation *Medienkompetenz* has spread in Germany from the late 1980s. Baacke connects the term communicative competence in reference to critical media theories with mass communication, especially Habermas (1973: 333). Later, he develops this concept further to ‘media competence’ (see e.g. Pietraß 2007: 3). Both concepts—‘media literacy’ and ‘media competence’ – have their roots in linguistic theory and communication studies. The Anglo-American approaches can be characterised by a strong focus on text analysis at the cognitive level (see e.g. Potter 2004 and the media literacy definition of the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE)). Instead, Baacke transcends the sole focus on language by picking up the concept of communicative competence. According to him, media competence is the ability to include all kind of media into a person’s repertoire for communicating and acting, in order to actively appropriate the world. It is the ability to use media in a goal- and needs-oriented way (1996). Baacke distinguishes between four dimensions, each comprising further sub-dimensions: media criticism (analytical, reflexive

and ethical), media knowledge (with an informational and an instrumental-qualificatory sub-dimension), media use (use through reception, offer interactivity) and media creation/design (innovative, creative and aesthetic). Against the original idea, the term 'media competence' is often used in a narrow way, being restricted to technical skills or to a solely critical media usage, leaving out the media critical or socio-critical aspects, and ignoring the action-oriented pedagogical understanding, which is dominant in most media educational concepts (e.g. Tulodziecki 2011; Grafe 2011). When *Medienbildung* is discussed, however, one usually wishes to emphasise that it is about processes that cannot be influenced and controlled by outside forces.

On a European level, the term 'digital competence' has been used as an overall term, and quite similar to a general understanding of media literacy. One example is the working group on 'key competences' of the European Commission 'Education and Training 2010'. This programme identifies *digital competence* as one of the eight domains of key competences, defining it as 'the confident and critical use of Information Society Technologies for work, leisure and communication. These competences are related to logical and critical thinking to high-level information management skills, and to develop communication skills. At the most basic level, ICT skills comprise the use of multi-media technology to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information and to communicate and participate in networks via the Internet.' (European Commission 2004:14).

Also, as part of the term 'media literacy', many more specific terms targeting specific areas and issues have been used. Examples of this are:

- 'information literacy', which has been used by librarians as ways of handling information and sources as part of media developments,
- 'visual literacy', especially by P. Messaris (1994), as a discussion of ways of interpreting visual representations,
- 'multimodal literacy', especially by G. Kress (2003) and C. Jewitt, as more complex representations.
- 'computer literacy/ICT literacy', focusing more on skills in dealing with computers.

As S. Livingstone (2007) has described, there is also other aspects to the term 'information literacy'.

This field concentrates primarily on computing, telecommunications, and information technologies, and draws on the study of information processing, computer science, and library studies to theorize, especially, multiple levels of access competences, to identify a range of

barriers and enablers to access, and establish initiatives for training or redistributing otherwise-unequal skills across the population.

A few years later, Livingstone further elaborated on the palette of different concepts as follows: 'the diversifying array of forms of mediated representation, and the ever more thorough mediation of all spheres of society, is positioning media and digital literacies as an increasingly important step on the path towards emancipation' (Livingstone 2010:35).

Digital literacy thus becomes a core and overarching concept. Other writers argue for more overall conceptions pointing to the fact that there are many literacies, arguing the need for concepts that include many of the other concepts within the field. Examples of this are 'multiple media literacies' (Meyrowitz, 1998), 'multiliteracies' (Cope & Kalantzis, 1999) and 'metamedia literacies' (Lemke, 2004). Still, we believe that 'media literacy' covers many of the other concepts used, but there is a need to emphasise this in plural, as literacies defined within different social practices.

Definitions

Different definitions of media literacy show both similarities and differences due to different approaches and positions (policy, practice and research). J. Potter (2004), for example, mentions that there are more than 20 different definitions of 'media literacy' in the literature, showing some of the challenges within this field. We will present just a few definitions that emphasise the different aspects of media literacy.

D. Buckingham (2009) has commented on the many definitions and policy initiatives on the European level during the last decade:

At the European level, there have been many signs that media literacy is becoming a priority for policy-makers. There is mention of media literacy in the key document, the European Audiovisual Services Directive (2007); and over the past couple of years, the Commission has been moving steadily towards the formulation of a binding policy on media literacy. ...one can find a vast range of ideas about what media literacy is. Among other things, media literacy seems to involve:

- Developing skills in handling technology;
- Encouraging appreciation of the European audio-visual heritage (albeit one which is typically identified only with the cinema);
- Protecting children against harmful content, and developing their awareness of online risk;
- Promoting the inclusion of hitherto excluded groups in using technology, and in the "knowledge society";
- Promoting independent public service media;
- Enabling people to resist commercial persuasion, and raising awareness of new marketing practices;
- Encouraging active citizenship and participation in civil society;
- Promoting creative and artistic self-expression through the use of new media, and enabling

people to communicate with audiences;

- Delivering the subject curriculum in more exciting and relevant ways for “twenty-first century learners”;
- Promoting equality of opportunity, tolerance and diversity - and even Human rights;
- Encouraging the development of a globally competitive European media content industry;
- Helping people to make informed economic decisions as media consumers;
- Training workers (or developing “human capital”) for the emerging media and technology industries of the “knowledge economy”. (Buckingham, 2009; 14).

Similar lists of what is covered in different definitions of media literacy have been made, illustrating how this term can be used for different purposes, for example linked to protection and regulating initiatives, education or popular culture. (See for example the European Charter of Media Literacy (Poettinger 2009:106) or Williamson, Morgan, & Payton 2010).

Some definitions have made a mark in the literature. For example, in 2003, Ofcom was charged with the responsibility to promote media literacy in the UK. Ofcom’s role has primarily been as an economic regulator or market regulator, rather than a content regulator. Ofcom’s definition of media literacy—‘the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts’—has been widely adopted internationally. The definition in fact derives from an older US definition by Aufderheide (1997). As D. Buckingham (2009) comments;

Of course, this comes packaged as a democratic move – a move away from protection-ism and towards empowerment. But it is also an individualising move: it seems to be based on a view of media literacy as a personal attribute, rather than as a social practice. Indeed, it could be seen to place a burden on individuals that they might not necessarily be disposed or able to cope with. And while it gives people responsibilities, it does not also extend their rights: it positions them as consumers rather than as citizens. It has become the duty of all good consumers – and, when it comes to children, of all good parents —to regulate their own media uses. (Buckingham, 2009; 16-17)

Ofcom then commissioned two literature reviews with different focus areas, one written by D. Buckingham et al. and one written by S. Livingstone et al., both in 2005. The reviews looked into both broadcast media and telecommunications and what was then paraphrased as ‘new media’: the Internet and mobile telephony. Buckingham’s review was focused on enablers and barriers for children and youth in acquiring media literacy, whilst Livingstone’s review focused on adult media literacy. Both of these documents include both creative and critical perspectives, which were used to discuss access, understanding and creativity.

In their review, Livingstone, van Couvering & Thumim (2005) made the following elaborations based on the definition by Ofcom.

Access has been divided into four sections: basic access and ownership, navigational competences, control competence, and regulation competences. Understanding includes both comprehension and critique. And creation includes both interaction with media and creation of media by the public. Generally speaking, the academic literature identifies three broad purposes to which media literacy makes a contribution. These are evident in driving the policy debates currently concerned with media literacy:

□ *Democracy, participation and active citizenship.* In a democratic society, a media-literate individual is more able to gain an informed opinion on matters of the day, and to be able to express their opinion individually and collectively in public, civic and political domains. A media-literate society would thus support a sophisticated, critical and inclusive public sphere.

□ *Knowledge economy, competitiveness and choice.* In a market economy increasingly based on information, often in a complex and mediated form, a media-literate individual is likely to have more to offer and so achieve at a higher level in the workplace, and a media-literate society would be innovative and competitive, sustaining a rich array of choices for the consumer.

□ *Lifelong learning, cultural expression and personal fulfillment.* Since our heavily mediated symbolic environment informs and frames the choices, values and knowledge that give significance to everyday life, media literacy contributes to the critical and expressive skills that support a full and meaningful life, and to an informed, creative and ethical society.

As Livingstone commented in a later report (Livingstone 2010:40–42), this definition by Ofcom pays far more attention to skills of access and use than to critical or creative skills. This is also evident in other influential definitions of media literacy, like the one made by the European Commission. It defines media literacy as;

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. (ibid.)

As Livingstone points out; “*Behind the debate over definitions, in other words, is a fundamental debate over the purposes of media literacy*”. (Livingstone, 2010: 42).

Another take on the concept of media literacy comes from a more US-based tradition focusing on skills and information processing, based on a cognitive approach (Potter 2004). In his book ‘Media Literacy. Second edition’ (2001), Potter makes the following description: ‘Media literacy is a perspective that we actively use when exposing ourselves to the media in order to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter. We build our perspective from knowledge structures. To build our knowledge structures, we need tools and raw material. The tools are our skills. The raw material is information from the media and from the real world. Active use means that we are aware of the messages and are consciously interacting

with them.' (2001:4). This has been further elaborated in his book 'Theory of media Literacy. A cognitive approach' (2004).

Still another definition, which is more representative of the UK-based approach and cultural studies is that by D. Buckingham. In his book 'Media education. Literacy, learning and contemporary culture' (2003) he writes:

Literacy is not seen here merely as a kind of cognitive 'tool kit' that enables people to understand and use media. And media education is thus rather more than a kind of training course or proficiency test in media-related skills. For want of a better term, media literacy is a form of critical literacy. It involves analysis, evaluation and critical reflection. It entails the acquisition of a 'metalanguage' – that is, a means of describing the forms and structures of different modes of communication; and it involves a broader understanding of the social, economic and institutional contexts of communication, and how these affect people's experiences and practices. Media literacy certainly includes the ability to use and interpret media; but it also involves a much broader analytical understanding". (Buckingham 2003: 36)

In her book '*Literacy in a digital world*' (1998), Kathleen Tyner studies some of the elements of a modern interpretation of literacy both related to what she terms 'tool literacies', to indicate the necessary skills to be able to use the technology, and 'literacies of representations', to describe the knowledge of how to take advantage of the possibilities that different forms of representation give the users, especially the new information and communication technologies. This indicates a similar division between a tool orientation of literacy and a more reflective social process.

Finally, a more overall and general definition of 'literacy' can be introduced here, as a way of saying that literacy can be connected to different media in different circumstances and situations, as part of social practices, as highlighted by Lankshear and Knobel in their definition of literacy as: 'Socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in discourses (or, as members of discourses).' (Lankshear and Knobel 2006)

It is not our intention to present one definition of media literacy, for the purpose of this working paper. We have presented a few definitions and reflections that illustrate different understanding of the term 'media literacy'.

Positionings

Further to the definitions presented above, the main research positions dealing with media literacy can be grouped as follows.

Media effects: Focussing on how media might affect young people paved the way for different strategies of how education and training of ‘critical viewing skills’ could prevent harmful effects (Brown 1991). Over the years, there has been more and more distance from cause-oriented and one-sided approaches, from stimulus-response approaches and from considering the audience to be passive rather than active (Kübler 2010). Elements of this perspective can still be seen in ways of conceptualising media literacy as protectionism and regulation.

Critical consciousness: This grew out of ‘Screen theory’ in the UK in the 1970s. Also, Kellner (1995) argues: ‘The Frankfurt School, for instance, developed a powerful critique of the cultural industries, but the critical theorists lack theories of how one can resist media manipulation, how one can come to see through its ruses and seductions, how one can read against the grain to derive critical insights into self and society through the media, and how one can produce alternative forms of media and culture.’ During the last couple of decades, such an approach has been linked to media literacy through cultural critics such as H. Giroux, P. McLaren and Sholle & Denski (1994) combining critical theory with ‘a pedagogy of the oppressed’ from P. Freire.

Cultural studies: Since the latter part of the 1980s, this has been the most influential perspective on media literacy, especially in the UK and the Nordic countries. D. Buckingham's work has been important in setting the agenda for studying young people’s cultural practices as a fundamental aspect of media literacy. Emphasis on production practices combined with critical reflection. Further, this tradition has historically focused on media language, semiotics and representation (A. Burn), and how children and youth can and do interpret or understand, share and use media messages in creative ways as part of their identity construction and social development.

Cognitive skills: This has been a more dominant US-based perspective since the mid-1980s, with links to cognitive theory in psychology. Much of the research within this perspective focuses on the cognitive skills needed by media users in order to critically interpret media

messages (Potter 2001). As such, media literacy initiatives have been built around procedures to enable people to make critical judgements of media messages (Brown 1991).

New literacy studies: During the last decade, this has become an influential perspective in both Europe and the US. It is based on classical studies in the 1980s that emphasised the need to study the social practices of literacy and the impact of different media on these social practices (Coiro et al. 2010). Partly this deals with how digital literacy differs from traditional print literacy (Merchant 2007), and partly about the visual turn in much research on practices of using digital media, for example within multimodal theories as expressed by G. Kress and C. Jewitt. This also builds on a long tradition of studying moving images within media education (Bazalgette, Bevort & Savino, 1992).

Media Bildung: This has been a traditional perspective within German-speaking countries since the 1970s (Baacke 1973). It implies studying media competences in a broad sense and in association with communicative processes, citizenship and critical reflection (Hug 2011).

Within a European setting, there are **regional differences** in conceptions, traditions and perspectives. As mentioned above, in the UK and the Nordic countries, the influence from cultural studies has been important, while in German-speaking countries the emphasis on *Medienbildung* and *Medienkompetenz* have been stronger. In Southern European countries there has been a stronger emphasis on ‘media literacy’ as part of discussions and perspectives on citizenship and empowerment, and with stronger ties to philosophical traditions. On the European level, there have been several initiatives in later years to consolidate the status of media literacy across different European countries. This has also been strengthened on the international research agenda through organisations such as UNESCO (Carlsson, Tayie, Jacquinet-Delaunay & Tornero 2008).

Conceptual frameworks

In 2008, José M.P. Tornero tried to summarize and chart media literacy built on recent UNESCO and EU reports and international reviews (Carlsson, Tayie, Jacquinet-Delaunay & Tornero, 2008). Using the European Charter of Media Literacy as foundation, he prepared a visual representation of the relationship between the main concepts in the field of media literacy. Building on this chart, and including the traditions, perspectives and positionings described so far in this meta-analysis we have tried to construct a wider conceptual map of the media literacy field to sum up our findings (see next page).

As pointed out initially, media literacy has traditionally been closely linked to educational concerns about how children and young people relate to media content. As the term has become broader in scope and approach in recent years, involving other traditions and perspectives within media and communication research, a conceptual map should also include the main research traditions and perspectives influencing the field. Where Tornero presents connections between some core concepts, we have tried to show the main influences on the core concepts we find in the literature in two ways. First by framing the map with what we see as the main research traditions influencing and debating the core concepts of media literacy, as marked with the white boxes along the edges of the map. Secondly by making a distinction between what we see as the interrelated core concept areas of media literacy within the literature, marked by green boxes at the centre of the map, and the many concepts used in the different research traditions and reviews in debating these core concept areas, marked by diamond-shaped blue boxes. For discussion purposes we have made a point of not chaining or interconnecting these latter concepts with either research traditions or core concepts, because we see them as more or less afloat within the field, being used for different purposes and in different ways depending on position and tradition. For example, the concept of ‘empowerment’, as pointed out by Buckingham (2009), can be related to at least three dimensions of the debate:

- Protecting children against harmful content, and developing their awareness of online risk;
- Promoting the inclusion of hitherto excluded groups in using technology, and in the “knowledge society”;
- Promoting equality of opportunity, tolerance and diversity - and even Human rights;

The point of showing these concepts as afloat within the field can also be connected to how different literacy understandings can be portrayed as developmental aspects to media and literacy and individual competences. For instance, in a study made by a group of European Experts on ‘Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe’ (European Commission, 2007) they end up with what they call ‘an evolutionary chart of media literacy and a concept model on media literacy’. It consists of four stages of literacy (from classic literacy, to audiovisual literacy, to digital literacy, to media literacy (which is needed as a result of media convergence)). In each of these stages, there are three distinct types of competences and skills involved, which are: semiotic for codifying and decoding, technical-instrumental and interpretative and cultural. This is brought together in the chart below:

Types of literacy	Functional skills related to reading and writing in a broad sense.		Critical and cultural skills related to literacy in the true sense.
	Codifying	Technical-instrumental	Understanding
Classic literacy	Reading and writing words	Using tools for producing writing and reading	Making sense of what is read and written.
Audiovisual literacy	Decoding fixed and moving images	Using suitable tools for audiovisual production and reading	To make proper sense of what is read and written <i>audiovisually</i>
Digital literacy	Decoding digital languages properly	Using suitable tools for digital production, reading and use.	To make proper sense of what is read and written through media languages and digital means.
Media literacy	Suitably decoding the languages common to the various systems of technological mediation.	Using the proper tools for the production, reading and use of the various systems of technological mediation.	To make proper sense of what is read and written through the various systems of technological mediation.

We will further in this meta-review go deeper in to some of the main conceptual discussions in the literature.

4. Media literacy on different levels

In the previous section, several categories and issues of media literacy have been mentioned. Instead of trying to synthesise or combine these categories under similar headlines, we have further opted to present them as different levels of understanding media literacy. The first section deals with the personal level of media literacy, about skills and competences in ways of dealing with media. The second section deals with the level of institutions and representations within media that media literacy relates to. The third level relates to issues of social interactions and practices of media use and media literacy.

4.1 Personal skills and competences

This sub-section covers different aspects of media literacy at a personal level. In the reviews, this covers media effects-related issues, reception analysis, cognitive skills, and critical theory. On one hand, an agenda of protection from risks in media use and the development of critical skills through education exists (Potter, 2004; Schwarz & Brown, 2005; Silverblatt, Ferry, & Finan, 2009); on the other hand, studies discuss empowerment and emancipation as an outcome of media literacy initiatives (Livingstone, 2010; Martens, 2010).

Access: As mentioned in the definition by Ofcom, access to media has received considerable attention. Literature suggests that children and young individuals already possess fairly high levels of *functional* literacy, i.e. the skills and competencies required to gain access to media content, using the available technologies and associated software (Buckingham et al., 2005:3). This research has moved away from simple conceptions of passive audiences towards obtaining a closer understanding of how people interact with media (Austin & Johnson, 2007; Martens 2010). As shown in an EU Kids Online study (Livingstone et al., 2011) and in former literature reviews (Buckingham et al., 2005), young people are generally 'aware of regulatory mechanisms and systems of guidance, and take these into account in seeking to make their own decisions. The large majority of young people show some awareness of risks relating to sexual dangers on the internet; although they are less aware of potential economic risks. Several studies in this area conclude that education in media literacy may be a more effective strategy than blocking or filtering.' (ibid. p. 3).

Skills: In both policy documents and research literature, a major theme has been the skills needed to relate to different media. This goes from operational skills in dealing with the medium itself to critically interpreting media messages (Potter, 2001), and users as responsible and efficient information seekers (Buckingham, 2009:18). To a large degree, the focus is on the medium or the technology itself as though there is an implicit assumption that using the medium is inherently beneficial. Such a focus on skills is also prevalent in recent initiatives on measuring digital literacy on a European level, as different levels of skills (European Commission, 2011). According to Rosenbaum, Beentjes and Konig (2008:340) 'the application of media literacy has shifted over the past few years, with a greater emphasis on health-related issues' (see Kubey 2003). Here, it is often thought to be a promising alternative to the censorship of regulating unhealthy programming or limiting media use (Bergsma, 2008; Timmerman et al., 2008; Byrne, 2009). As this approach often comes down to activating

cognitive defences against commercial persuasive content, Eagle (2007) coins the term commercial media literacy (Martens, 2010:7). For Lim and Nekmat (2008), the media-literate individual is someone who has an appreciation for those who control media content, and how the political economy of the media industry is reflective of and influenced by geopolitical trends, a realisation of why some content types are excluded from media messages while others are intensively amplified, a sensitivity to one's own conscious and unconscious responses to mass media, and an awareness of the effects these media can have on individuals (ibid. p. 3).

Understanding: This is also a concept that is part of the Ofcom definition of media literacy. However, different reviews and research have highlighted other similar concepts such as analysis, evaluations and critical interpretations (Martens 2010; EuroMeduc 2009). In their review, Buckingham et al. (2005) reported that research literature 'suggests that children's awareness of areas such as television 'language', the difference between representation and reality, and the persuasive role of advertising, develops both as a function of their increasing knowledge of the world, and as a result of their broader cognitive and social development.... It is important to emphasise that these areas apply just as much to fictional material as to factual material; and that critical understanding goes hand-in-hand with the development of aesthetic and emotional responses to media of all kinds.' (2005:3) Much of the research on the Internet primarily focuses on retrieving information rather than evaluating it (Buckingham, 2009:18). Another take on this is research on 'critical media literacy'. Kellner and Share (2007) for example combine cultural studies with critical pedagogy in an attempt to expand the notion of literacy to include different forms of media culture, in order to analyse relationships between media and audiences, information and power. In their article, they use such an approach to address issues of gender, race, class and power. Using similar concepts of 'critical media literacy' but with another approach, there are numerous examples of teaching materials and 'tool kits' on how to teach young people to become critical consumers of media (e.g. Center for Media Literacy, 2003.) However, there is little evidence in the research literature that such programs really have the intended consequences on media use by students (Martens 2010).

Production and creativity: This approach to media literacy focus more on the active participation of young people in their productive practices using different media. This has been an issue in former studies of video production among young people (Drotner, 1991) or

different technological tools (Buckingham, Grahame & Sefton-Green, 1995). However, due to Web 2.0 technologies and different software tools, this issue has become a core in research media literacy during the last decade (Coiro et al., 2008). There are numerous examples of how digital media represent new ways of 'writing' and producing content, recently termed as 'remixing' (Lessig, 2008). Creativity as a personal ability has also come to the fore as ways of expressing oneself using competencies in using different media (Drotner & Schrøder, 2010). Research also suggests that there is considerable potential for media to be used as means of communication and self-expression, not least by socially disadvantaged groups; that creative involvement in media production (particularly in the context of education) can make an important contribution to the development of critical understanding; and that new media such as online gaming and mobile telephony provide possibilities for new forms of interaction (Buckingham et al., 2005:3; Erstad et al., 2007).

4.2 Media systems and content

This sub-section covers the 'object of analysis' in media literacy, what media literacy is directed towards. As such it covers the whole field of media studies, of why it is important to study the media.

Content: Media literacy programs often feature an awareness of how audiences interpret media content. Different people can experience the same media message differently. As Kellner and Share (2005) explain, Stuart Hall once argued that a 'distinction must be made between the encoding of media texts by producers and the decoding by consumers' (Martens, 2010: 4). In his meta-review of 'media literacy education', based on a large number of studies, Martens (2010) argues that 'most scholars define media literacy in terms of the knowledge and skills individuals need to analyze, evaluate, or produce media messages'. These knowledge and skills mainly relate to four key facets of the mass media phenomenon, i.e. media industries, media messages, media audiences, and media effects. Strikingly, media literacy scholars often frame their findings in relation to contrasting applied research topics, such as active citizenship, public health, and (to a lesser extent) aesthetics. (Martens 2010:3). Often, media literacy researchers reason that awareness of the constructed nature of media messages is essential to a valid evaluation of media content. 'Media do not present reality like transparent windows because media messages are created, shaped, and positioned through a construction process. This construction involves many decisions about what to include or exclude and how to represent reality.' (Kellner and Share 2005:374).

Aesthetics: Historically, media literacy education has often been synonymous with learning to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of mass media, especially the cinematic arts. Also, Brown (1998:47) emphasise that an important goal of media literacy education is 'to develop selective viewers who seek out and appreciate distinctive high-quality of form, format, and content in mass media' (see also Chen, 2007; Edgerton & Marsden, 2002; Considine, 2002; Zettl, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2005). By contrast, others criticise this approach for its underlying assumptions about 'cultural value' (Bragg, 2006; Buckingham, 1998). Martens (2010:8) points to the fact that 'apart from these few exceptions, media aesthetics seem to have disappeared from the research agenda of most media literacy scholars'. Meyrowitz (1998) distinguishes between media content literacy and media grammar literacy. According to him, 'the most common conception of media is that they are conduits that hold and send messages. This conception has fostered many ways of discussing and studying the content of media.' (Meyrowitz, 1998:97). By contrast, media grammar literacy involves a focus on the particular characteristics of each mass medium, e.g. print media, radio, television, or the Internet – through which the examined messages are conveyed. Thus, several authors describe how 'visual syntax' (Messaris, 1998; Heiligmann and Shields, 2005), 'codes and conventions' (Rosenbaum, Beentjes, and Konig, 2008), 'aesthetic aspects' (Zettl 1998) or 'media grammar' (Meyrowitz, 1998; Gumpert and Cathcart, 1985) interact with content elements. (Martens, 2010:4). In recent years, the analytical lens of 'multimodality' has become important (Kress, 2003; Jewitt, 2008), with clear implications for media literacy in the way that aesthetic dimensions of analysing media become more aware of the multimodal aspect of media texts.

Systems: On a macro level, several scholars highlight the systemic aspects as part of media literacy, as expressed by Lambert (2009:38): 'research looking into the economics, sociology, history and semiology of the media. To which markets do the different types of media belong, who produced them, which public acknowledges them and how does this public use them, what histories do they inherit, which are their languages, what are their images, what part do they play, by telling the story of what happens to us, on the public and democratic scene? The media itself is the subject of all this research, which can be transferred to form part of pluridisciplinary teaching. This will allow us to understand the media, to know how to ask questions of it in its complexity.' Likewise, Duran, Yousman, Walsh and Longhore (2008) argue for a holistic approach to media literacy, 'one that encompasses both textual and contextual concerns within a critical framework....From this perspective, in addition to being

able to skilfully deconstruct media texts, the person who is truly media literate is also knowledgeable of the political economy of the media, the consequences of media consumption, and the activist and alternative media movements that seek to challenge mainstream media norms.' (In: Martens, 2010:3).

Institutions: In his review (2010), Martens referred to research focussing on the nature of commercial mass media institutions. This is part of an overall approach on increased commercialisation in media industries, and changes due to the impact of digital media. Thus, profit motives, ownership patterns and market forces shape the output of media industries. Media literacy programs therefore may concentrate on the selectivity of the producers and the notion of producers' motivations, purposes, and viewpoints (Rosenbaum, Beentjes, and Konig, 2008). Primack, Sidani, Carroll, and Fine (2009) describe media organisations' financial and political motives and the way they target specific audience markets as an essential core concept of media literacy. Gotcher and Duffy (1997) explain how video news releases can be studied to alienate students from a conception of news as transparent reportages of world events to the conception of news as shaped by exigencies of time, space, power, and money. According to Lewis and Jhally (1998:112), 'an analysis of political economy should not be restricted to a narrow set of economic relations. The media are determined by a set of social and economic conditions that involve the key dividing lines of our culture, whether they be race, class, gender, sexuality, age, or mobility.' (Martens 2010:3–4).

4.3 Social interactions and practices

This sub-section is more related to collective rather than personal aspects of media literacy, as social interactions and social practices using media that people are involved in within communities and societies.

Participation: A central goal for H. Jenkins writings on participatory culture (2006) has been to shift the focus of the conversation about the digital divide from questions of technological access to those of opportunities to participate and to develop the cultural competencies and social skills needed for full involvement. Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement. The new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking. These skills build on the foundation of traditional literacy, research skills, technical skills, and critical analysis skills taught in the classroom. The new skills that he then highlighted include: play, performance,

simulation, appropriation, multitasking, distributed cognition, collective intelligence, judgment, transmedia navigation, networking and negotiation.

Citizenship: As mentioned by Viviane Reding, the Information Society and Media Commissioner of the European Commission: 'In a digital era, media literacy is crucial for achieving full and active citizenship....The ability to read and write —or traditional literacy— is no longer sufficient in this day and age....Everyone (old and young) needs to get to grips with the new digital world in which we live. For this, continuous information and education is more important than regulation.' (Buckingham 2009:14). The very concept of media literacy has switched from being a mere option to being a core part of a wider Citizenship Education. This explains why the European Recommendation dated 20 August 2009 states that 'Media Literacy is a matter of inclusion and citizenship in today's Information Society....Media literacy is today regarded as one of the key prerequisites for an active and full citizenship in order to prevent and reduce the risks of exclusion from community life.' (Rivoltella 2009:44). In an age where mass media are seen as a key social institution (Silverblatt 2004), many scholars view access and understanding of contemporary media as a vital aspect of citizenship in general. For example, Lewis and Jhally (1998) argue that '[m]edia literacy should be about helping people to become sophisticated citizens....Just as political education allows citizens to think more critically and constructively about politics, media literacy can provide people with the wherewithal for thinking about the limits and possibilities of media systems.' (109–113). Likewise, Livingstone (2004:11) emphasizes the importance for any definition of media literacy to position people 'not only as selective, receptive, and accepting but also as participating, critical; in short, not merely as consumers but also as citizens'. Silverstone (2004:48) argues that media literacy is 'a pre-requisite for full participation in late modern society, involving as it does the critical skills of analysis and appreciation of the social dynamics and social centrality of media as framing the cultures of the everyday'. Media-literate individuals, it is argued, take an active rather than a passive role in acquiring new knowledge and skills. In this way, they become fully able to participate as critical consumers and citizens in a media-saturated society (Thoman and Jolls, 2004; Bergsma 2004; Galician, 2004; Kubey, 2004). Within this context, media literacy is also often linked with public access community radio and television (Higgins, 1999; Wagg, 2004), citizen journalism (Lim and Nekmat, 2008), and more broadly, the public sphere (Kovacs, 2003; Papacharissi, 2002; Fisherkeller, 1999; Vande Berg, Wenner, and Gronbeck, 2004).

Content creation: As Livingstone (2004: 8) points out, 'in key respects, content creation is easier than ever....Many [pupils] are already content producers, developing complex literacy skills through the use of e-mail, chat, and games. The social consequences of these activities – participation, social capital, civic culture – serve to network (or exclude) today's younger generations. At present, cementing content creation within media literacy programs requires further research to establish the relation between reception and production in the new media environment, together with further clarification of the benefits to learning cultural expression, and civic participation.' (Martens 2010:6). This is also about how to make effective use of the myriad of opportunities (such as animations, podcasts and interactive posters) that digital technologies provide for creating outputs that represent and communicate knowledge and meaning in different formats and modes for different purposes. Through this process, learners can be supported to understand that the digital media they engage with is also created for certain purposes and for certain audiences. Similar issues have been raised by J. March in her literature review on 'Childhood, culture and creativity' (2010). In this review, she mentions two aims: to develop a critical synthesis of literature that explores the relationships between childhood cultures and creativity, and to outline the implications of these relationships for researchers, educators and policy makers. The review addresses literature relating to the cultures and creativity of children from birth to the age of eight.

Emancipation: Traditionally, emancipation has been used as an alternative strategy than regulation. S. Livingstone explains, 'The emancipatory agenda is motivated by three intersecting projects. First, equality of opportunity in the knowledge economy: in a market economy increasingly based on information and communication networks, equality of opportunity and literacy and an end to the digital divide becomes a priority. Second, active participation in a democracy: in a democratic society, media and information-literate citizens gain informed opinions on matters of the day and are equipped to express their opinions individually and collectively in public, civic and political domains, thereby supporting a critical and inclusive public sphere. Third, the agenda of human rights and self-actualization: since a highly reflexive, heavily mediated symbolic environment informs and frames the choices, values and knowledge that give meaning to everyday life, media and information literacy contributes to the lifelong learning, cultural expression and personal fulfilment that is the right of every individual in a civilised society.' (Livingstone 2010:36). Legrande and Vargas (2001:77) hold that 'media literacy is largely about empowering underrepresented

populations by giving them a language to articulate their critiques of dominant media messages and a means of producing texts that challenge the stereotypical representations of themselves disseminated by the mass media' (see also Yosso, 2002; Kavoori and Matthews, 2004).

The three sub-sections in this part have all been important in the way media literacy education (Martens, 2010) has developed over the last three decades. Media education has addressed many of the concerns and interpretations of media literacy as a way of thinking about childhood and youth in contemporary media culture. In some countries like Norway, media literacy, or rather digital competence, has moved from the margins of the national curriculum to become one of the core issues in recent years, and is considered as important as being able to read and write. Similar transformations have taken place in Europe, in core policy documents, and in international initiatives on '21st century skills'. However, much of this transformation occurs at the policy level, with a lack of substantial research backing.

5. Synthesising and the Future

During the last decade there has been an increase in initiatives focusing on media literacy (see for example <http://www.emedus.org/p/project.html>). Media literacy is now interpreted as something more than a matter of training functional skills, of teaching about spreadsheets, databases, and file management (e.g., Silverstone 2004; Buckingham 2007; Erstad, Gilje, and de Lange, 2007; Sourbati, 2009). However, most initiatives are still strongly policy based.

In her book '*Literacy for sustainable development in the age of information*' (1999) Naz Rassool presents an overview of different debates on literacy during the last decades. Her point is that research perspectives on technology and literacy needs to reconceptualise power structures within the information society, with an emphasis on 'communicative competence' in relation to democratic citizenship. Empowerment is related to the active use of different tools, which must be based upon the prerequisite that actors have the competence and critical perspective on how to use them for learning and development. Literacy, seen in this way, implies processes of inclusion and exclusion. Some have the skills and know how to use them for personal development, others do not. Education is meant to counter-act such cultural processes of exclusion.

Everywhere, it seems, we hear of cyberliteracy, digital literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, Internet literacy, network literacy, and so on, and this, it seems, points to a new discourse whereby the academy can examine, critically or otherwise, the ways in which people ordinarily engage, creatively or otherwise, with media and communication technologies. Is this, one must ask, a useful new direction? What are the advantages, and are there any pitfalls, of reframing the analysis of people's engagement with media in terms of literacy? (Livingstone, 2010).

Buckingham et al. (2005) point to some barriers and enablers to media literacy. Among the barriers they mention are "social class and economic status as the most well-established. Less is known about other potential barriers such as disability and ethnicity, or about the role of individual dispositions or motivations. It should also be acknowledged that different social groups may have different orientations towards particular media – or different forms of 'cultural capital' – that may influence the nature and quality of access. Potential **enablers** of media literacy include parents, teachers (both in schools and in informal educational settings) and other agencies such as broadcasters and regulators." (ibid. p. 3). And as Buckingham et al. (2005) further remind us; "The nature and extent of the media literacy that individuals need and develop depends very much on the purposes for which they use the media in the first place. Different social groups may also develop and require different forms of media literacy in line with their motivations and preferences in media use. As such, we need to beware of adopting a reductive or mechanistic approach to assessing levels of media literacy among the population at large." (ibid. p. 4).

Although there are many approaches to literacy, there is now a consensus that media literacy is a social phenomenon as well as an individual characteristic. Literacy development is to a large extent linked to economic growth and the development of civic consciousness and political maturity. The literate person lives within the literate society.

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