

# FOSTERING MEDIA LITERACY ACROSS ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

<sup>1</sup>LAURA MALITA, <sup>2</sup>GABRIELA GROSSECK, <sup>3</sup>SIMONA SAVA

<sup>1,2,3</sup>West University of Timisoara, Romania

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>laura.malita@e-uvt.ro, <sup>2</sup>gabriela.grosseck@e-uvt.ro, <sup>3</sup>lidia.sava@e-uvt.ro

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**Abstract** - We are leaving nowadays in a world where technologies are ubiquitous, where digital products and services are transforming industries, enriching lives, and propelling progress. Therefore, many students entering the university today have had already a large exposure to digital technologies and media. They are exposed to an abundance of information, but how to cope with these digital “assets” and use them to cross properly the bridge between the personal and academic use of technologies is our role as educators to teach them. They need to learn how to integrate a proper use of media in their daily lives and how to blend properly the digital know-how and academic practices in order to succeed in any chosen occupation. Thus, a certain degree of media literacy is necessary for each student in order to use media appropriately and to become active and responsible digital citizens. There are several definitions of media literacy and according to European Commission, “media literacy refers to all the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow us to access and have a critical understanding of and interact with media. These capacities allow us to exercise critical thinking while participating in the economic, social and cultural aspects of society and playing an active role in the democratic process.” Nevertheless, under the umbrella term of media literacy, it can be integrated the context (e.g. social, educational, commercial), the content (knowledge, insights, skills, attitudes) and the actors involved (academics, policymakers, developers etc.). However, media literacy can be spread in several ways both to education and to educators, no matter of the subjects they teach, such as Social Sciences, Arts, Humanities or STEM. As education should pay attention to an active and creative use of media as a learning tool, the main role in this process is carried out by teachers. Are they prepared to teach students toward understanding how and why people engage with media, how they make sense of what they consume and how on long-term individuals are affected by their “digital media consumption”? In these circumstances, a measurement of teachers’ media literacy is difficult and instruments for measuring teachers’ competencies in the field of media education are very rare, quite a few. Therefore, through this paper the research questions are as follows: Are the teachers equipped with an adequate level of media literacy themselves as they are expected to foster among their students?; Are they able to recognize, to reflect on their improvement and to address gaps related to their digital media skills?; Are they able to include the development of digital media skills and capabilities in their teaching?; Are they coping with new media applications and sources and identify the adequate media literacy needed in order to be promoted properly among their students?; Do they need an institutional support (i.e. guidance as professional development provided by teachers to complement each other (with different level of media literacy) and thus to achieve the educational goals for their students) and/or policy recommendation for evaluating and fostering media literacy across the curriculum? By addressing such questions through an online questionnaire provided to Romanian teachers, we intend to obtain an adequate and updated view of teachers’ media literacy competencies in order to assess their needs, to initiate specific actions for a proper and specific improvement and development. Such actions could be in line with those recommended by European Commission or could vary, opening new research areas and topics of interest.

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**Index Terms** - Media Literacy, Media Education, Digital Literacy, Romania

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Through history, media was a powerful force in the lives of people. Nowadays, as we are leaving in a world where technologies are ubiquitous, where digital products and services are transforming industries, enriching lives, and propelling progress, a direct consequence is the fact that people around the world are increasingly exposed to media. In this context of development and expansion of an increasingly digital society, the media evolves even digitally. The traditional forms of media such as broadcasted (television, radio, music, movies/cinema) and printed (newspapers, magazines, books, signs, billboards) co-exist with new form of media accessible through digital artefacts like websites, blogs, wikis, mobile apps, email, podcasts, social networks, streaming video or music, etc. On the other hand, different type of media (paid, owned, rented, earned) is also curated digitally, no matter of the type of

content: video (interviews, demos, tutorials, talks, live streaming etc.), audio (podcasts, audio books, music, soundtracks, interviews etc.), slides (presentations, cases studies, e-books etc.), graphics (info graphics, research, memes, storyboards, timelines etc.). Therefore, the explosion of different types of media means people are becoming increasingly media consumers. Year by year, in the specifically related literature, we can see statistics and reports that bring forward people’s exposure to media content for different categories: age, social, economic, educational or geographical background. Moreover, if we are referring only to the last two years, media consumption around the world was continuously covered through analysis and scientific highlights by specialized institutions and statistics portals like Eurostat 1 , Web Economic Forum 2 , Statista 3 ,

<sup>1</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Digital\\_economy\\_and\\_society](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Digital_economy_and_society)

American Pew Research Centers<sup>4</sup>, Common Sense Media<sup>5</sup> or The Digital Media and Learning Research Hub<sup>6</sup>.

However, a digital society means active citizens, critically engaged through digital sources and technologies, in order to create quality digital content. Therefore, the media education is more important than ever. Besides, how people are engaged and assess critically today's media is a process of continuous learning of media literacy skills – in other words, there is a need of lifelong learning media education.

## II. WHAT IS MEDIA EDUCATION?

Defining media education is not a simple task. According to Buckingham (2003) several definitions of media literacy/media education evolved over time worldwide:

- In 1989 the Ontario Ministry of Education defined media education as an aid for “helping students develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of mass media, the techniques used by them and the impact of these techniques. More specifically, it is education that aims to increase students’ understanding and enjoyment of how the media work, how they produce meaning, how they are organized, and how they construct reality. Media literacy also aims to provide students with the ability to create media products.” A decade later (2010), Canadian Teachers’ Federation defines media education as “the process through which individuals become media literate-able to critically understand the nature, techniques, and impacts of media messages and productions.”
- The American National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) suggests several definitions such as: “a constellation of life skills that are necessary for full participation in our media-saturated, information-rich society”; “the study of media, including ‘hands-on’ experiences and media production” or “the educational field dedicated to teaching the skills associated with media literacy.”
- The European Commission stress that “media literacy refers to all the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow us to access and have a critical understanding of and interact with media. These capacities allow us to

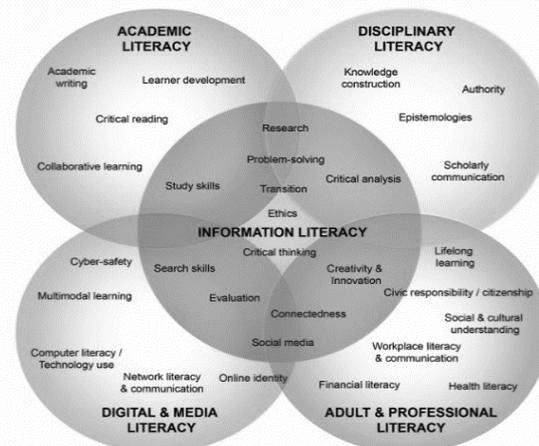
exercise critical thinking while participating in the economic, social and cultural aspects of society and playing an active role in the democratic process.”

- In the meantime, in Asia media literacy is seen as “a life skill which enables young people to critically understand, analyze, use and influence the media” (Lee, 2010).

Instead of defining the term we consider more important to understand the nuances: media education is the process of teaching and learning about media whilst media literacy is the outcome of this process, the knowledge and skills learners acquire.

Another important clarification that should be done is that media literacy/education often overlap with other forms of literacy (Fig. 1), especially with information and digital literacy (Fig. 2).

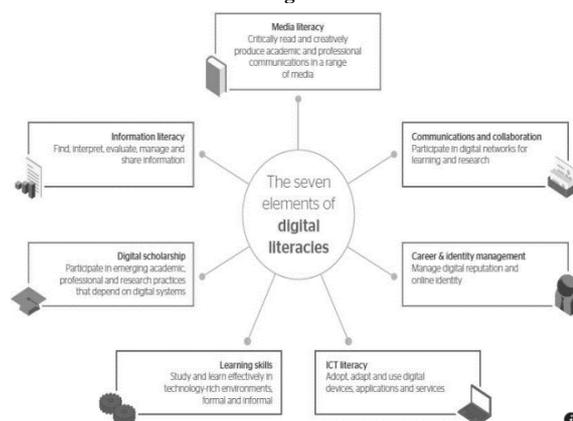
Figure 1



Source:

<https://informationliteracyspaces.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/ancil-il-model.jpg>

Figure 2



Source:

<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-digital-literacies>

Moreover, under the umbrella term of media literacy, Ping (2017) purpose that one can integrate the

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<https://www.weforum.org/system-initiatives/shaping-the-future-of-digital-economy-and-society>

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<https://www.statista.com/statistics/380155/leisure-time-media-usag-e-teens-germany/>

<sup>4</sup> PEW regularly conducts surveys on technology use in the United States, and collects data on media use,

<http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.common sense media.org/research>

<sup>6</sup> <https://dmlhub.net/>

context (social, educational, commercial), the content (knowledge, insights, skills, attitudes) and the actors involved (academics, policymakers, developers).

### **III. WHY IS MEDIA EDUCATION NECESSARY?**

We live in a society in which information is easier to access by the citizens than ever before. For children, teenagers or students, media constitutes a major component of their social and cultural environment. Although they are exposed to an abundance of information application and technologies, how to cope with these digital “assets” and use them to cross properly the bridge between the personal and academic use is often taken for granted (Murray and Perez, 2014). Unfortunately, most of them don’t know (and need to learn) how to integrate a proper use of media in their daily lives and how to appropriate blend the digital know-how and academic practices and curriculum in order to success in any chosen occupation. A step ahead was accomplished by UNESCO by providing a curriculum framework for media and information literacy (Grizzle and Wilson, 2011).

Thus, the Media and Information Literacy curriculum should help develop teachers’ understanding of how media and information literacy might be utilized in the school curriculum. They must be able to critically assess media texts and information sources in the light of the functions attributed to news media and other information providers. And for that purpose, to select a wide range of material from media and information resources. They must have skills to assess students’ understanding of Media and Information Literacy.

Moreover, “Teachers must know and understand how media and other information providers have evolved into present forms. They must develop skills in using available technologies to reach different audiences, from print-based media to new media. They must be able to use various media and information resources to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills and extend these to their students.” (Grizzle and Wilson, 2011, p. 29) In other words, being media literate becomes vital for young people to wisely interact/integrate/engage within a changing society. As such, our role as educators is to teach students at least a certain degree of media literacy, necessary to use media appropriately in order to become active and responsible digital citizens.

### **IV. MEDIA EDUCATION AROUND THE WORLD**

As a pioneer in the field, Australia is the first country where media education has been made mandatory and part of schooling from kindergarten through high school and universities. Today media is studied as a

broad subject in most of the Australian states. Canada is also an outstanding example where media education has been integrated across the curriculum, having a place in nearly every course and subject, such as social sciences, science, family studies, music, law etc.

Other countries that are in an advanced stage of media education development are United Kingdom, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden, France and Switzerland (Butts, 1992). There are also countries where media education is quite well developed (the United States, Germany etc.) as well as countries and regions which have small-scale initiatives in media education such as Japan, Taiwan, Mainland China, the Philippines, India, Russia, Hong Kong and some from South America. Unfortunately, there are also countries with no policies regarding the explicit introduction of media education across the curriculum. As a reality - among them there is Romania, too. It is true that media education initiatives come from different sectors of the society. As an example - stakeholders involved in promoting media education come from youth, religious, media universities, social welfare organizations, primary and secondary schools, government education departments, media concern groups etc. (Lee, 2010). In Europe, in order to foster media education/literacy the European Commission supports national/regional or local initiatives, prizes, projects, programs, and funding schemes (see Creative Europe), official reports and surveys, coordinates with member states on policies and best practices and also develops new policies based on expert group findings.

### **V. THE CASE OF ROMANIA**

Only by looking at initiatives, programmes, good practices and/or examples from around the world it is not enough in order to foster media literacy/education across Romanian curriculum. In the equation of using media as a learning tool, that includes terms like media education, media literacy, teachers and curriculum, the main role is carried by teachers. Are they prepared to teach students toward understanding how and why people engage with media, how to make sense of what they consume and how on long-term individuals are affected by their “digital media consumption”? Such measurement of teachers’ media literacy is difficult and instruments for measuring teachers’ competencies in the field of media education are very rare, quite a few. In this respect, one goal of our research was to develop and apply a survey to teachers at a national scale. We are in the process of analyzing data (subject of a future paper). Our analysis is based on Fedorov, Levitskaya&Camarero (2016) work about the curriculum of media literacy education. Some preliminary findings range from the resistance of the administrative bodies (such as Ministry of Education, the National Educational Sciences Institution, etc.), overloaded curriculum in the classroom to the lack of a proper initial and continuing training for teachers, the

development of the critical thinking towards the media or the development of high-level research and curriculum proposals. We also want to highlight the fact in Romania an important milestone is an effective teaching and learning at all levels and should reflect a sophisticated understanding of the subject matter, instructional and assessment practices.

## VI. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

It is a reality that media education has become an important player among any discipline across the curriculum. There are some countries with a major development in this direction, some that are in the process of introducing media education across the curriculum and most of the countries still struggling with the whole process/ecosystem of media, digital and also information literacy in education. Therefore, more concrete steps should be done in this direction because only by an integrated and functional ecosystem of actors involved (academics, policymakers, developers etc.) and also the main target group – students, we can hope in the near future more concrete outcomes (media, digital and information literacy) to be made visible and effective in the national education systems and across the whole curriculum. Moreover, as media evolves continuously national related media education syllabuses should be revised and updated. These are Romanian Higher education system further steps to be made in the next years.

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