Towards Media Literacy in the Education Curriculum: Experience of Latvia

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Abstract: Media literacy is important for life in the changing world. Media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of forms as well as the ability of individuals to access and understand information through different media tools and platforms, such as television, radio, print media, the Internet and digital technology. The aim of the paper is to analyse the planning of developing the media literacy in the basic education curriculum in Latvia. The study, using the document analysis, has selected the basic education curricula in the new education content project Competence-based approach in the teaching/learning content School 2030 in the following areas: Technologies, Social and civic area, Sciences area. Such criteria as the skill to find the information in the digital environment; the skills to analyse the obtained information; the skill to evaluate the credibility of the information were chosen in the research aspect of developing the media literacy. The study concludes that the skill to find information in different sources and the skill to analyse the found information are purposefully developed in the expected learning outcomes. The development of the skills of evaluating the credibility of the found information, however, needs more attention.

Keywords: basic education, curriculum, media literacy.

Introduction

New economic realities and rapid shifts in labour markets are fundamentally changing education systems around the world; and now, access to high quality education institutions at all levels is globalizing as well (Jolls, 2014). This change movement toward being a global information economy and having education systems to match are persistent and demand attention, experimentation, and investment (Jolls, 2015).

As a consequence of the change in the meaning attributed to literacy, the competencies that literate individuals need to possess are being redefined. The competencies of literate people nowadays include the ability of analysing critically messages of different types, such as texts, images, and audio files, videos in multidirectional and multidimensional information and communication channels, and creating texts in different forms. Moreover, in this new period, the problem of accessing information has been dissolved thanks to the opportunities offered by ICTs. In contrast, avoidance skills to abstain from information sources (Bawden, Robinson, 2009) that are constructed, harmful and unreal (Potter, 2008) are regarded among the literacy skills. Today, information and knowledge are often considered to be the most strategically important resources, and learning - the most strategically important capability, for any individual, community, or the entire nation. Despite the fact that access to information and knowledge has increased during the last decade due to the higher levels of basic literacy in many countries around the world, significant challenges and obstacles still remain. It is still not obvious how to create a favourable environment for learning, or how to nurture the capabilities of citizens (Global Media and…, 2013). An individual today needs to possess the following competencies: recognizing and expressing facts, making use of texts of different types to express one's emotions and thoughts, reflecting on the obtained knowledge and relating it to one's own behaviours, knowing the form of texts shared in different sources and re-creating and using them, possessing up-to-date knowledge and skills, communicating effectively, building one's capacity to be able to provide cultural and social contribution, expressing oneself through using one's knowledge and skills in social and cultural field (Kellner, Share, 2005; Ayres, Langone, Douglas, 2009; Bahadin, Cahit, 2017).

Media literacy is understood as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms (Aufderheide, 1993; Bahadin, Cahit, 2017) as well as the ability of individuals to access and understand information through different means, such as television, radio, print media, the Internet and digital technology (Silver, 2009). The core of media literacy includes a wider variety of aims, goals and intentions, including the ability to create messages, reflect on media influence and consider the social responsibilities of being an effective communicator, and use the power of information and

communication to take appropriate forms of personal, social and political action (Hobbs, 2010; Hobbs, Tuzel, 2017). Thus, media literacy includes four main skills to be an effective media literate - access, analyse, evaluate and communicate (Aufderheide, 1993; Hobbs, 2001; Livingstone, 2003; Jolls, 2008; Silver, 2009; Schmidt, 2013; Silverblatt, 2014), as well as using media tools and platforms effectively (Potter, 2009; Bahadin, Cahit, 2017). Media constitutes the whole range of modern communications - television, cinema, video, radio, Internet, music, magazines, and games - and media texts are the programs, films, images, websites, and more consumed by mass audiences (Buckingham, 2003; Harshman, 2017). Media literacy can be regarded as an umbrella term independent of the variables such as media tools at use, technology and so on. Besides, the unprecedented developments and increasing variety in ICT have had a significant role in the emergence of new forms of literacy such as new media literacy and social media literacy (Walsh, 2010).

As media literacy is understood as the right of all citizens (Area, 2012; Fedorov, Levitskaya, Camarero, 2016), then efforts should be made conducive to digital inclusion to ensure access to new technologies, implementing and promoting standards and accessibility guidelines through the implementation of training courses and media education (Garcia-Murillo, MacInnes, 2002). This assumption is based on the curriculum that is able to evaluate the use of technology and knowledge of the media, supported by psychoeducational theories that encourage young people and the general public to use them positively. It is also based on the personal contribution of those who can improve society through their moral values (Camarero, Cuadrado, Herrero-Diz, 2015; Fedorov, Levitskaya, Camarero, 2016).

The framework of the curriculum of media literacy education is based on the following approaches: Enhancing consumer awareness, Critical thinking, Considering the role of citizenship, Ontology, Value, Semiotic, Cultural studies, Synthetic creative, Cross disciplinary approaches (Andersen, Duncan, Pungente, 1999). Media literacy has many benefits in the teaching /learning process. For instance, media literacy engages students - bringing the world of media into the classroom connects learning with "real life" and validates their media culture as a rich environment for learning and gives students and teachers alike a common approach to critical thinking that, when internalized, becomes the second nature for life. It provides an opportunity for integrating all subject areas, increases the ability and proficiency of students to communicate (express) and disseminate their thoughts and ideas in a wide (and growing) range of print and electronic media forms - and even international venues (Jolls, 2015).

As it has been concluded in the UNESCO study on media literacy, then only fifty percent of 9-12-year-olds and adolescents (13-16 years) – eighty percent think they can compare different internet websites and websites to understand whether the information in them is true. Some children and adolescents lack the knowledge and skills necessary to use, create and share various types of information safely and skilfully (Petijums par 9…, 2017), thus there exists a challenge for the Curriculum developers to give the students an opportunity to understand and use the Internet or the possibilities offered by ICT in the implementation of a meaningful teaching/learning process.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the planning of the development of media literacy in the basic education curriculum in the Latvia.

Methodology

The study, using the document analysis, has selected the basic education curricula in the new education content project Competence-based approach in the teaching/learning content School 2030 (Skola 2030, 2017) in the following areas: Technologies, Social and civic area, as well as the Sciences area, which in the theoretical study were noted as being the most important in the development of media literacy. Such criteria as the skill to find the information in the digital environment; the skills to analyse the obtained information; the skill to evaluate the credibility of the information were used in the theoretical study.

Results and Discussions

As the content of the **Social and civic area** is closely connected with each individual's abilities to understand the society and the processes happening in it as well as the skill to join and participate in it therefore such crucial media literacy skills as the skill to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate should be definitely emphasised.

For instance, when acquiring social sciences and history in basic school, the student forms his/her historical and civic awareness as well as stable social habits in communication and interaction with peers. The student develops and explains the personal "I" observing and participating in the social environment of the local community; make decisions that are significant to oneself and others in the everyday situations; explores economic, political and social problems that are important for Latvia as a state and the society in the context of present and the past; participates in the social processes and evaluates the consequences of one's actions (Skola 2030, 2017).

Table 1

Planned learning outcomes in the Social and civic content area

Social and civic content area			
	The skill to find information in the digital environment	**The skill to analyse the obtained information**	**The skill to evaluate the credibility of the information**
Outcomes to be reached finishing Grade 3	**Obtains information** from diverse sources of information about social groups that are represented in the closest community (family, class, school, church parish, etc.) in order to conclude to which social groups the student belongs		
Outcomes to be reached finishing Grade 6	**Searches for examples in mass media** (newspapers, Internet news sites, etc.) and literature about people's actions in different everyday situations. **Searches for examples in the information sources** about Latvia's relations with neighbouring countries... **Searches for examples in the information sources** about the expression of sponsoring and charity in the society nowadays and in the history...	**Analysing the information available** in the home page of the Enterprise and municipality register finds out which enterprises and in which spheres are functioning in the local municipality.	
	Obtains information from mass media about personalities the student would like to resemble **in order to conclude** which character qualities, knowledge and skills it possesses and substantiates his/her choice. **Obtains and analyses the examples discussed in mass media…**		
Outcomes to be reached finishing Grade 9	**Using different sources of information, makes out** common and different features in the countryside and towns... **Explores job vacancies, experts' opinions a.o. sources in order to conclude** which knowledge and skills are needed in the labour market. **Using different mass media, evaluates** the impact of transformations caused by technologies, cultural traditions and social status on the development of both Latvia and the whole humankind… **Compares the information found in different mass media…** **Seeks examples in virtual media, …** **Using different sources of information** (press, library, memoirs, archive, etc.), **plans** and makes inquiries about the cultural and historical legacy of the region in order to prepare informative materials, popularize and organize visits to the memorial sites and to preserve them improving the sense of belonging to Latvia.		**Using different mass media, summarises and groups different opinions** about historical events of Latvia in order to draw conclusions based on facts about the causes of emerging different/contradictory opinions and the **credibility of information sources.**

Thus, the content of Social and civic area, its acquisition should be closely linked with the media literacy in which the focus is laid both on the skill to find information in the digital environment and to analyse the information about history and issues of civic awareness, about economic, political and social issues important to the state of Latvia and its society. The skill to find information in the digital environment is mainly emphasised and acquired in the context of media literacy finishing Grades 3, 6 and 9 (Table 1). The observed tendency is that in each set of grades the acquisition of media literacy is gradually and successively broadened. For instance, finishing Grade 3 the possibility to master the skill of finding information in the digital environment is facilitated, finishing Grade 6 this skill is supplemented with

the skill to analyse the obtained information and finishing Grade 9 the skill to evaluate the credibility of information is included in the content

In Sciences the student finds out the processes and phenomena in nature applying the inquiry skills. The link with the media literacy as the skill to find information in the digital environment, the skill to analyse the obtained information as well as the skill to evaluate the credibility of information are important in the inquiry action. It is indicated in the new teaching/learning content of the sciences area that applying the inquiry skills in different contexts the student learns to think as a scientist, acquires the experience of scientific thinking not only in the lessons but also making civilly responsible decisions in different life situations. Finishing the basic school, the student recognizes, offers and evaluates explanations about a definite set of natural phenomena; uses the inquiry skills in problem solving and performing small inquiries; analyses and evaluates data, expresses personal opinion and arguments in different ways and draws conclusions from data; acts responsibly for preserving the surrounding environment (Skola 2030, 2017).

The skill to find information in the digital environment is included in the science area in the context of media literacy. Despite the fact that the aim of the sciences area stresses the importance of analysing and evaluating the data, it is mainly understood as the evaluation of the data obtained in the inquiry process not the skill to analyse the information found in the digital environment. The skill to evaluate the credibility of information, in its turn, is envisaged for the Grades 7-9 (Table 2).

Table 2

Planned learning outcomes in the Sciences content area

Sciences content area		
	The skill to find information in the digital environment	**The skill to evaluate the credibility of the information**
Outcomes to be reached finishing Grade 3	Under the teacher's guidance **uses the information sources** (children's encyclopaedias, handbooks, media).	
Outcomes to be reached finishing Grade 6	**Uses information sources** (encyclopaedias, plans, maps, globe, instructions) applying a suitable strategy.	
Outcomes to be reached finishing Grade 9	**Uses information sources** (periodic table of chemical elements, deliquescence table, metal activity range, scale of electromagnetic waves, map of the star-lit sky, biological drawing, classification schemes of living organisms, phylogenetic trees, pyramid of gender age structure, climograph, geo-chronological scale, soil profiles, satellite pictures, aero photos, thematic maps), **applying a suitable strategy**	**Gives arguments to one's opinions using credible data from several sources,** models and topical science theories that support or overturn the explanation about natural phenomena and processes.

In technologies area the student learns about different aspects how things (products) are created in the world, how they are made manually, using tools, equipment or automatically. During the basic school the student gains practical experience of the technologies' progress participating in the process of creating and implementing things (products) and digital solutions, learning to think and perform as a craftsman, designer, engineer, and programmer. Finishing the basic school, the student is able to make products that are personally needed or necessary for the community and offer digital solutions, designing and constructing, using different methods, tools and equipment, incl. digital, choosing the appropriate materials and design; has acquired practical experience of realizing a simple technological process and solving engineering and technical problems; is able to use safely, effectively and responsibly digital technologies for self-realization, communication, cooperation, participation; forms the habit to use resources purposefully and responsibly in practical work (Skola 2030, 2017).

During the initial stage of basic school students get acquainted with simple application programmes that are necessary for the acquisition of other school subjects. In Grades 4-6, students do practical projects

and create simple products (things), models, objects and acquire different strategies, incl. digital, in the work with different materials. The new content in Technologies area pays special attention to digital literacy, its development and does not link it with media literacy. The skill to find information dominates in Technologies content area, but the skill to analyse the obtained information and the skill to evaluate the credibility of the found information are developed and improved minimally. For instance, the skill to find information in the digital environment dominates in the outcomes to be reached finishing Grade 3; no attention is paid to whether and how to analyse the found information and the skill to evaluate the credibility of information (Table 3).

Table 3

Planned learning outcomes in the Technologies content area

Technologies content area			
	The skill to find information in the digital environment	**The skill to analyse the obtained information**	**The skill to evaluate the credibility of the information**
Outcomes to be reached finishing Grade 3	**Opens the Internet site, uses hyperlinks** and in search engine seeks the information according to the given keyword. **Copies the text and picture from the Internet site** into another document giving the references. **Uses** some main functions of the **school management systems and Internet learning sites,** including communication possibilities. *Mention consequences that can appear downloading files and opening sabotaging Internet sites*		
Outcomes to be reached finishing Grade 6	**Finds information** about responsible design solutions in the digital environment, **analyses, structures information** according to given instructions, formulates and expresses personal opinion about them, makes a survey in the Internet, summarises the obtained information; Uses responsibly several Internet services (e.g., World Wide Web, Web browser, communication tools, and planner) in order to **find or share information,** keeping the safety rules and considering their advantages and disadvantages.		
	Uses IT for getting acquainted with the cultural legacy of one's region (town, municipality) and acquiring other experience		Explains why **the content of the disseminated information should be evaluated,** evaluates the adequacy of the information accessible in web pages to the concrete target group.
Outcomes to be reached finishing Grade 9			Gives features and ways of cheating out (fishing) of information, explains how to **escape from defrauding of information.** Is aware that sometimes cyberspace can be used as a means of propagating cruelty and violence.

Conclusions

Media literacy is important for the life in a changing world. Media literacy is understood as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms as well as the ability of individuals to access and understand information through different means, such as television, radio, print media, the Internet and digital technology.

Media literacy is developed in the new basic education curriculum. The outcomes to be reached in Technologies, Sciences and Social and civic areas planned in the Curriculum, finishing Grade 6 the skills to find information in different sources and to analyse the found information are developed purposefully and their development continues until the end of Grade 9. However, the development of the skill to evaluate the credibility of information is little paid attention. Only some outcomes in each of the three content areas serve as evidence to this. Here the new basic education curriculum needs improvement.

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