

IV. Empowerment through Information and Media Literacy

*Meeting summary report by rapporteur Esra Arsan, Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul; syndicate expert/background report by Katia Segers, Vrije University, Brussels, and additional syndicate expert Paula Poindexter, AEJMC president, University of Texas at Austin, USA; chair Arnold de Beer, South African Communication Association; and team members.**

Media messages are becoming increasingly more complex and difficult to analyze. Journalism educators often focus their attention on teaching media literacy to media consumers. Although this is an important task, they need to also make sure that journalism students understand how to apply this knowledge to their work. After all, as future content producers they need to understand how to find and report verifiable information via truthful frames while weeding out distorted, deceptive messages along the way. Media literate reporting can also help empower journalists and citizens alike by offering them information they can use to actively participate in their communities and help change them for the better.

Since the media play such an important role in political life by setting political agendas, speeding up decision-making and manipulating citizens' choices, it's essential that journalism students learn to deconstruct media messages in order to analyze them, find truthful information and flesh out as much bias and deception as possible. Such skills can also help them distinguish news from advertising and propaganda.

This group focused on how to teach media literacy to young, millennial generation journalism students. First, since they are often not interested in news, educators need to try to peak their curiosity by presenting it in exciting ways that pertain to their lives. Second, since the news young people absorb frequently comes from often unreliable social media sources, including Facebook and Twitter, educators need to teach journalism students how to find credible sources and create accurate information.

Journalism educators must teach students how to use media as an accurate information source. In order to do so, they should help them practice deconstructing stories via a variety of techniques, including showing them how different sources often cover specific events/issues in dramatically different ways. This understanding could help them create better information/messages and better serve society.

The group agreed that since media and political systems vary dramatically worldwide, it's difficult to find a balanced way to deconstruct such messages, let alone to teach students to do so. It also agreed that it's essential to teach media literacy in a non-ethnocentric, culturally sensitive manner. More empirical research is needed to help educators find innovative ways to teach media literacy in different regions and countries.

The group applauded UNESCO's media literacy work worldwide and suggested the WJEC should consider partnering with such efforts in the future.

It agreed that the "truth" about world events should be considered a human right. Accordingly, educators and students who seek out truth via media literacy techniques should feel proud about such humanitarian efforts.

Recommendations

The group concluded with the five following recommendations:

1. Educators need to understand their students' media habits and the media ecology they inhabit in order to truly reach them during media literacy training.
2. Educators must teach students how to deconstruct media messages from different kinds of sources so they can understand their ideological, cultural, ethnic, nationalist, propaganda and/or corporate biases.
3. Educators need to conduct more empirical research to better understand different media usage in different countries and how to teach media literacy in a balanced, culturally sensitive fashion.
4. Educators must become active social media users so they can adequately navigate their students' media environment and can competently help them critic it via media literacy techniques.
5. Students should be encouraged to make their own media so they can learn to produce better information, become better communicators and get better jobs.

**Additional Empowerment through Media Literacy participants: Peter Burger, Leiden University, Faculty of Arts, Journalism & New Media, The Netherlands; Gonnie Eggink, Hogeschool Windesheim, The Netherlands; Wellington Gadzikwa, Harare Polytechnic, Zimbabwe; Linia Diana Kyaligonza, Mountains of the Moon University, Uganda; Hamdy Naila, The American University of Cairo, Egypt; Marie Jeanne Razanamanana, University of Antananarivo, Madagascar; Ibrahima Sarr, CESTI, Senegal; Alexandra Wake, Deakin University, Australia; Richard Tote, University of Maryland; Alexandra Temenugova, School of Journalism and Public Relations, Macedonia; Kim Fox, The American University of Cairo, Egypt.*