

mentor

Association



UAB



Media Education – Renewing UNESCO's commitment

April 1999

1. Programmes and initiatives

Since 1950 UNESCO has been engaged in activities concerning the relationship education-communication, and media education has been a major concern of the Organisation since 1964. The growing awareness of the role of communication in modern society, moved media education away from a solely hardware-centred approach to learning in a participative and critical way.

1.1. In the early years

In 1961, UNESCO published a paper on cinematographic education which was considered important since cinema and television were becoming a 'second world', especially for young people. The year after, UNESCO took part in organising an international meeting on the topic. The meeting encouraged systematic thinking on the reasons why educators are responsible for stimulating the development of a critical mind so far as mass communication is concerned (Finnström, 1997).

In 1970, the " International Symposium on the Impact of the representation of Violence in the Mass Media on Youth and Adults " was held under UNESCO auspices at the Organisation's Headquarters in Paris in accordance with a decision of its General Conference (15th session, 1968). The symposium brought about 23 specialists in mass media, sociology, psychology, criminology, social work and education from 18 countries as well as observers from 23 international non-governmental organisations.

In 1975-1976, UNESCO designed a general curriculum model for mass media educators in secondary school. The model aimed at providing students with adequate and varied knowledge of the theory of mass media for their own personal fulfilment. This model was later tested during the 70's in ten countries in different parts of the world. In the UNESCO series 'Reports and Papers on Mass Communication', an international bibliography was published in 1977, entitled "Media Studies in Education".

1.2. UNESCO's Regular Programmes and Medium-Term Plans (1979 - 1995)

In the beginning of the 1980's media education was part of the UNESCO programmes and the subject was then well established from the previous years.

The issue of media education was included in the two Medium-Term Plans for the periods 1984-1989 and 1990-1995. In the plan for the first period, media education was part of the programme Education, Culture and Communication. The second sub-programme on education and communication, defined the new tasks to be carried out by education in order that it may provide the necessary means for the analysis, screening and judicious use of the information (disseminated by the communication media) ; to make the public aware of the cultural aspects of communication technologies and, at the same time, of the need for critical analysis of the information transmitted by the communication media.

In the Medium-Term Plan for the period 1990-1995 (25 C/4), media education was under the programme " Socio-cultural impact of new communication technologies " of the major programme " Communication in the Service of Humanity ".

It was stated that " UNESCO's action will endeavour in particular to remedy certain consequences that could result from the existing imbalances in the field of communication. To this end, UNESCO will contribute to the development, in countries requesting such assistance, of training for communication professionals and the facilities for media education aimed at users. Among the users, media education will lay emphasis on the development of critical awareness and the capacity of individuals and communities to react to any kind of information received and will at the same time promote a better understanding of the means available to users to know and to defend their rights ". Provision was also made to developing the objective appreciation of the media through media education, to maximising the benefits of media use, especially among young people, and to improving knowledge of how the media function in different societies. It was specified that emphasis would be placed on learning through doing, including experimental work in media production by young people and community organisations.

In the Medium-Term Strategy for 1996-2001, media education is not specifically mentioned. It is however specified that the coming technological revolution will have major repercussions on societies and that under the combined effect of technological advances and the globalization of communication, the maintenance of linguistic and cultural diversity might well become an issue. In this context, UNESCO's mandate, " urges it to promote reflection on the impact of these technologies, and to foster access to the possibilities they offer for educational, scientific and cultural development ". The Organisation therefore intends to offer the international community a forum for interdisciplinary debate on the new applications of the information and communication technologies so as to observe their

development, consider their likely effects - both beneficial and harmful - on societies and individuals (28 C/4).

Within the framework of the Regular Programme for 1979-1981, an expert meeting was organised on " The role, effects and use of mass media ". The participants agreed on four main objectives for media education : incite reflection, develop critical abilities and discernment ; develop a responsible attitude ; incite awareness of cultural identity ; develop respect for other peoples' culture by learning to live with others. The " International Commission on Communication Problems ", set up by UNESCO and chaired by Sean MacBride, also touched upon the relationship between education and communication (MacBride, 1981).

The Regular Programme for 1981-1983 of UNESCO (21 C/5) made provision to encourage a wider and freer flow of information, reduce the imbalances and obstacles still to be found in communication structures, broaden and balance the flow of messages and diversify their origin and content, while reflecting the cultural values of different societies. It was also intended to draw attention to the social implications of communication problems, and in particular their ethical aspects, and to encourage action to enlist the participation of the public and educate it in the use of the media. The programme was written into a long-term overall interdisciplinary perspective : co-operation between culture and communication.

In 1982, an " International Symposium on Education of the Public in the Use of Mass Media " was held at the " Institute for Films and Pictures in Science and Teaching " in Grunwald, near Munich, by UNESCO's Education Sector in co-operation with the then Communication Sector (today : Communication, Information and Informatics Sector, CII) together with the German National Commission for UNESCO.

The Regular Programme of UNESCO for 1984-1985 (22 C/5) encouraged close and active co-operation between the different communication media and education systems and to increase awareness of their respective characteristics and requirements in educational and communication circles. The sub-programme made provision to help develop a critical public awareness of the mass communication media and to encourage young people to take part in the public debate on communication. The expected results were an increase in number of experiments in media education in Member States ; better knowledge of the conditions necessary to promote the gradual integration of media education for non-professionals into education systems ; an increase in the number of textbooks and practical guides used for media and improved methods for the training of specialists in media education.

Indeed, media education was part of the programme and budget of UNESCO until the beginning of the 1990's.

As from 1990, media education was dealt with, within UNESCO, mainly by CII, which in 1990, organised an international colloquy on " New Directions in Media Education ", held in Toulouse, France, together with the Council of Europe. In 1992, together with the British Film Institute and the Centre de Liaison de l'Enseignement et des Moyens d'Information (France), CII issued a publication with the same title based on the results of this colloquy. The meeting in Toulouse concentrated on three topics : how the professional media can participate in media education ; media education and developing countries ; strategies for media education in different countries.

April 1997 marked the organisation by UNESCO of a " Working Group on Children and Media " at its Headquarters in Paris. In November 1997, during the 29th General Conference of UNESCO, several member states stressed the importance of media education directed to youth and children, especially as a mean to raise the awareness about how violence is used on the screen. Accordingly, in the Regular Programme for 1998-1999 (29 C/5) media education was included thanks to Resolution 29 C/DR61 presented by Austria and supported by several countries. It led to the organisation of the Vienna International Conference " Educating for the Media and the Digital Age " (April 1999, Vienna, Austria) in collaboration with the Austrian National Commission for UNESCO and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs ; it also marked the renewed co-operation between the Education Sector and the Communication, Information and Informatics Sector of UNESCO in this field.

At the special initiative of the Director-General of UNESCO, in January 1999, some 300 specialists in child care and protection, Internet specialists and service providers, media practitioners, law enforcement agencies and government representatives met at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris to consider ways of combating child pornography and paedophilia on Internet. One of the conclusions of the meeting was to develop media and Internet education, information and awareness strategies to sensitise children, parents, teachers, educational institutions, social workers, the media and decision makers.

2. Some issues

While further analysis would be needed, some main issues can be mentioned.

2.1. Media Education and Media Policy

In the 1980's, media education had registered only meagre achievements or remained underdeveloped except in a very small number of countries and it was figured out that to

be effective, media education was inseparable from media policy (Grunwald, 1982). Everything therefore depended on political will. However, even without the will to introduce media education generally, limited or half-scale experiments were considered to be useful in determining the problems involved, examining how the operations functioned and finding new arguments to influence decision-makers.

Two objectives were set at the " International Symposium on Education of the Public in the Use of Mass Media " (Grunwald, 1982) : to collect and examine information, data about experiments and ideas on media education and more generally on the relationship between education and communication, and to identify or suggest steps to be taken to develop media education and to promote the conscious use of the media in education. At this symposium, the UNESCO Declaration on Media Education was issued clearly stating that : " rather than condemn or endorse the undoubted power of media, we need to accept their significant impact and penetration throughout the world as an established fact, and also appreciate their importance as an element of culture in today's world ". Throughout the years, the Declaration became a useful reference and practical tool among professionals of the field.

Some criticism was passed on both the formal and the informal educational systems, which at the time, did little to promote media education or education for communication. The arguments for media education as a preparation for responsible citizenship were seen to be formidable or, in the light of the development of communication technology, even irresistible.

Conscious of the importance of improving the relations between education and communications in society, educators, communicators and researchers at the Grunwald Symposium (1982), called upon the competent authorities to :

1. Initiate and support comprehensive media education programmes on different levels of the education system - the purpose of which is to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes which will encourage the growth of critical awareness, and of a greater competence among the users of electronic and print media.
2. Develop training courses for teachers and intermediaries to increase their knowledge and understanding of media and train them in appropriate training methods.
3. Stimulate research and development activities for the benefit of media education.
4. Support UNESCO's actions already taken to encouraging international co-operation in media education.

Certain participants at the Grunwald Symposium (1982) noted that it was difficult to influence the media from outside and that the media should themselves give some thought to the matter, taking into account their extraordinary power (films and television especially) of conferring legitimacy to things. It was recommended to encourage the formulation and

implementation of strategies aiming at integrating media education at different levels of education and teaching and in the activities of the different institutions. As well as to invite Member States to use media which were available, to promote media education and instigate and facilitate a north-south dialogue on questions of media education. This could for instance, be achieved by giving access of interested country to extracts or elements of television programmes or the mass media (press, publicity, etc.) produced in other countries in order to enable them to know more about the communication methods of others, to facilitate the work of educators by avoiding ethnocentricity and thus promoting dialogue between cultures and mutual understanding between nations. The Grunwald Symposium (1982) also meant to encourage and set up studies to actively support the preparation of the Second International Symposium on Media Education - which never took place.

Is media education just another addition to the already existing educational subjects or is it to be seen as something different ? Indeed, some participants at the Toulouse colloquy (1990) thought that media problems should not be studied within the general context of communication problems, i.e. not as a form of knowledge but as a process of communication to be established. This communication education would be in effect an active challenge to the receiver, thereby breaking the exclusive monopoly of the transmitters, whether they are " educationists " or " communicators ". Seen in this light, media education, found a precise place within this communication education. The discussion of all these problems led to the conclusion that educational action could be taken on three possible levels :

- a media and message education which explains how messages are produced and circulated by the media ;
- a communication education which consists in teaching how to join in communication situations in different contexts which do or do not involve use of the media ;
- a meaning education, showing the processes (psychological, sociological, semiological) by which people produce meaning in a communication situation.

Three main areas relating to children and media were identified by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in October 1996. These areas were child participation in media, protection of the child against harmful influence through the media and respect for the integrity of the child in media reporting. Twelve recommendations within these areas were subsequently formulated by the rapporteur of the meeting, Ambassador Thomas Hammarberg. The recommendations were elaborated and certain actions added by a " Working Group on Children and Media " (April 1997, UNESCO, Paris).

One of the recommendations stressed the importance of media literacy and the need to include media in the school curricula at all levels. The working group emphasised in its report " the importance of helping children to become critical consumers of media in all its forms, a task which today fewer parents assume and which, although included in school curricula in some parts of the world, is not consistently or widely undertaken nor implemented with updated information ". It was also noted, with regret, that UNESCO seemed to be less active than before in this area (Finnström, 1997).

2.2. Violence in the media

Is there more violence in the world than there used to be ? Many people believe that there is, and many, too, believe that the mass communication media are to some extent responsible. Concern with this responsibility - real or imagined - has led in different countries to inquiries, surveys and investigations of various sorts ; to the adoption of recommendations and media codes of ethics ; to the drawing up or revision, in some cases, of censorship laws.

What is meant by violence ? What is commonly assumed and what is actually known about the relation between violence in the mass media and violence in real life ? How can the media carry out their traditional mission of informing, educating and entertaining in such a way that their influence will tend to reduce violence rather than increase it ? Such were the issues raised at the " International Symposium on the Impact of the representation of Violence in the mass media on youth and adults " (UNESCO, 29 June - 7 July 1970)

The Symposium came to a general agreement on the dangers that can result from the inconsiderate use in any culture of programmes produced for another, and some participants expressed the view that the mass media of countries exporting material of a violent nature should be clearly condemned. On the other hand, it was suggested that exchanges of good locally produced material through the regional broadcasting unions could provide variety and at the same time give audiences a chance to know more about neighbouring countries which, like exporters further afield, might have problems and aspirations similar to their own. The need was also stressed for making effective use of television as a tool of education as well as a culturally enriching form of entertainment. It was also pointed up that many of the developing countries were lacking in the skills as well as the money to produce good television material or feature films. Technical skills, it was emphasised, are essential but are not enough ; skills must be imparted, and talent trained, on every creative level as well. Where audiences are already used to the foreign product, the task will be all the harder, an observer noted with some pessimism " the youngsters say that if we cut out their favourite programme, they'll never watch television again ". This remark laid emphasis on the need for media education in developing

countries as in others. Here as elsewhere, it was recognised, the problem of providing more suitable programmes is linked with that of helping audiences to become more critical.

2.3. Strategies for Media Education

In general, 1987-1988 seemed to have signalled new departures in several countries, a fresh interest and concern linked to a rapid proliferation of media channels, a measure of social unease about media (especially television) and a growing sense of 'critical responsibility'.

The Toulouse colloquy (1990) reviewed the media education practices in the different countries represented and analysed the factors leading to success and identified the needs of teachers and pupils. It also suggested that the activities regarding media education could be grouped in four broad categories of countries :

1. Countries in a comparatively advanced stage of media education development (Australia, Canada, England, Finland, France, Norway, Scotland, Sweden and Switzerland). The official educational climate is favourable to progress and in some cases media studies has acquired status by inclusion in the menu of public examinations.
2. Countries where development is uneven, depending mainly on individual teacher initiatives and support from outside agencies, but with little recognition or funding from national/regional education authorities (Israel, USA, West Germany).
3. Small-scale initiatives (mainly from church organisations) in countries where media education is not recognised by the education system as a whole.
4. Countries where recent political or social change has opened up new opportunities for media education (at the time of the colloquy, in 1990, the USSR and Yugoslavia exemplified this category. Curriculum planning was taking new directions and media education was seen as both relevant and motivating for young students).

The media and, in particular the most important medium, television, are often used in the home. Indeed, television has become a major socialisation factor and dominates the life of children in urban and electrified rural areas around the globe (The UNESCO Global Study on Media Violence, 1998). Many participants at the Toulouse colloquy (1990) were therefore of the opinion that parents had an important initial role to play in every media education programme. Repeated mention was made of the role of pleasure and entertainment in television programmes (should pleasure be made a means of instruction or not ?) and of the fear that media education might also be taken over by the schools. In the view of some participants, the conception of education was still 'dominated' by educators. It was also noted that in general, teachers had not been trained to teach these new things : teachers should therefore receive instruction on the resources and strategies of the media as part of a general teacher training programme.

Many participants also stressed upon the fact that media education could not be divorced from media policy. The hope was expressed that contact could be made with the communicators. Journalists and communicators should themselves be better informed and trained regarding the problems of communication and education. Their own training should include this 'new dimension', which would also involve examining the job they do, their professional criteria, and the problems of a 'new communication and information order'. Some participants also thought it desirable that certain aspects of media education should be turned into concepts that everyone could understand, and that an information and training policy for adults as citizens should be set up (this ties up with the education of parents as adults and not merely as parents).

The " International Symposium on the Impact of the representation of Violence " in the mass media on youth and adults (UNESCO, 29 June - 7 July 1970) had also come to a general agreement on the need for education in the use of audio-visual media, for both young people and adults. A suggestion was made that the media themselves might undertake " consumer education " to counteract a certain naiveté on the part of their audience.

2.4. Media Education and Developing Countries

The Toulouse Colloquy (1990) demonstrated that media education was no longer seen as a national culturally specific issue, but that despite differences in approaches and socio-cultural locations there were a common concern and a degree of coherence. However, distinction was made between developed and developing countries, and specific sections were created at the Colloquy. This division effectively meant that the South spoke only to the South, the North to the North, and their voices were not heard mutually across the boundaries.

It was clearly stated during the Toulouse colloquy (1990), that in developing countries, media education outside the formal educational system deserved particular attention : educational activities of grassroots and non-governmental organisations being especially important in bringing out those aspects of media education which enable individuals and groups to contribute actively to endogenous cultural development.

The informal committee of the Africa region at the colloquy, furthermore recommended that media education should be considered as a new dimension of overall education ; and that account should be taken of its importance and implications for political, juridical, economic, educational, socio-cultural and technological planning.

The committee also suggested that a newsletter of information about media education in Africa should be published, to arouse awareness of this subject ; that media education should be introduced into teaching programmes at all levels ; that teaching experiences should be exchanged at all levels (local, regional, national and international) ; that forums should be set up for media workers and media consumers to exchange views and that an

international information network on media education should be set up, with links to both local and regional centres.

Bibliography

Approved Programme and Budget for 1981-1983 (21 C/5), UNESCO.

Approved Programme and Budget for 1984-1985 (22 C/5), UNESCO.

Approved Programme and Budget for 1998-1999 (29 C/5), UNESCO.

Children and Media Violence (1998), Yearbook from the UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the screen, UNESCO, Goteborg University, Nordic Council of Ministers.

Finnström, Asa (1997), Media Education - a renewed commitment for UNESCO ? CII, UNESCO.

International Symposium on Education of the Public in the Use of Mass Media : Problems, Trends and Prospects, Grunwald, Germany, 1982, Final Report, 23 Nov. 1982, UNESCO.

MacBride, Sean (1981), Media Crisis (The) : the problems faced in UNESCO, the MacBride Commission report, the new information order, the challenges of Belgrade, Miami, Fla., World Press Freedom Committee, 113 p.

Media Education (1984), UNESCO Publishing, 211 p, UNESCO.

Medium-Term Plan (1984 - 1989), 24 C/4 Approved, UNESCO.

Medium-Term Plan (1990 - 1995), 25 C/4 Approved, UNESCO.

Medium-Term Strategy (1996 - 2001), 28 C/4 Approved, UNESCO.

Report (1994) : International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, 4th Session, 1994, 15 p, UNESCO

Report of the Working Group on Children and Media (1997), Meeting of 14 April 1997, UNESCO, Paris.

Reports and Papers on Mass Communication, (1971), UNESCO, 44 p.

Reports and Papers on Mass Communication (1988), UNESCO, 45 p.

UNESCO Global Study on Media Violence (1998), a joint project of UNESCO, the World Organisation of the Scout Movement and Utrecht University, UNESCO, Paris.

Working paper, Symposium on the Impact of Violence in the Mass Media (1970), 6 p, UNESCO.