

INFORMATION AND MEDIA EDUCATION

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

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Introduction

We are overwhelmed by information and media content which places increasing demands on our information and media competency. To rely on knowledge gained through self-learning in the area of information and media education may prove to be insufficient. Already primary and secondary school students are learning how to use information resources and media efficiently (Altmanová et al., 2010; RVP, 2013). The quality of information and media education in schools depends largely on the qualification and motivation of teachers. The Department of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) of the Pedagogical Faculty of the University of Ostrava has devoted many years to the preparation of future teachers for both information and media education (Dpt. of ICT, 2013). Students of a single field acquire information about information science as well as media studies. This approach proves to be a great advantage since information and media education can be perceived as two sides of the same coin. The author examines functional, information and media literacy and describes how students majoring in the field of Information Technology in Education acquire competency in these areas.

Functional literacy

Even though the results of international surveys (OECD PIAAC, 2013) did not confirm the thesis of the dramatic decline of the Czech educational system, it would not be prudent to abandon efforts to increase the functional literacy of both children and adults. Among other reasons, because functional literacy is the basis of information and media literacy.

According to the definition of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1978) “*a person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development.*”

Functional literacy consists of several components (Dombrovska, 2004), which can be represented by the following diagram:

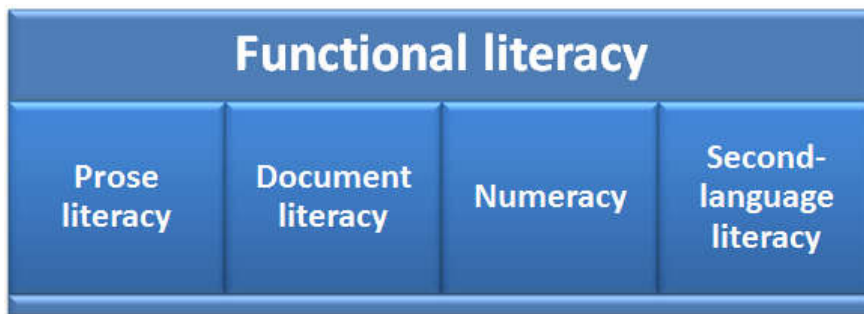


Fig. 1: Functional literacy consist of prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy and second-language literacy

More precise content and meaning of the individual components of functional literacy is given in the following list of characteristics:

- Prose literacy is the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information in continuous texts, such as news and current affairs articles in newspapers and magazines.
- Document literacy includes the knowledge and skills needed to find and use information in different types of discontinuous or short, but richly structured documents, such as forms, transportation schedules, maps, instruction manuals, figures or charts.
- Numeracy is represented by the knowledge and skills necessary for carrying out operations with figures found in texts and documents, such as tables, graphs, bills or purchase orders in e-shops catalogs.
- Second-language literacy means the ability to communicate in a foreign language.

Functional literacy includes not only the ability to interpret, but also the ability to retrieve information from various resources and assess its quality and relevance, the ability to classify, categorize and store the information so that it is seamlessly available for later use, and last but not least the ability to clearly and convincingly present it to others.

Information literacy

Information literacy can again be simply illustrated by the following diagram:



Fig. 2: Information literacy consists of functional literacy and ICT

Information literacy can be characterized in detail by the following list of applicable knowledge, skills and abilities:

- the ability to identify a person's own information needs;
- the ability to obtain information and assess their relevance;
- the ability to store and again find the stored information;
- the ability to effectively and ethically use information;
- the ability to use information for the creation and sharing of knowledge;
- the skill to use ICT to work with information.

Information literacy cannot be reduced only to the skill of operating a computer. ICT literacy is only one of the components of information literacy. Among other things, this means that an information literate person is able to utilize the entire portfolio of information institutions and resources. Thus, not only can he/she use the Internet, but can also take advantage of libraries, media centers, archives, museums, as well as personal contacts, lectures, seminars, workshops or scientific meetings. Among the major information institutions and resources that an information literate person actively uses to his/her advantage are also (mass) media, both print (newspapers, magazines) and broadcast (radio and television). In such cases the information and media literacy blend together, which can be seen as two sides of the same coin.

Media literacy

Although information and media literacy are close to each other and overlap in many areas, they are not completely interchangeable. Media do not provide only hard data and factual information. As described in the functionalist theory of media (McQuail, 2009), media are one of the subsystems of the social system and perform several functions here:

- information, i.e. providing information about events, but also about the existing relations of power, facilitating adaptation and promoting innovation;

- correlation, i.e. explaining and commenting on the meaning of events, supporting established authority and social standards;
- continuity, i.e. supporting prevailing cultural patterns, but also finding new directions in the development of culture;
- entertainment, i.e. amusement, diversion and relaxation, reducing social tension;
- mobilization, i.e. lobbying for socially important goals, but also commercial promotion.

Complete media literacy is not just defense against harmful influences of media, but also the ability to use media actively to our own advantage, understanding the patterns of media and their part in a life of a person and society. A teacher who includes media education in his syllabus should strive to train his/her students to become an active and critical audience. Such an audience has the following characteristics:

- chooses what to monitor, and how much attention to devote to it;
- wants to meet its needs;
- acts deliberately;
- actively interprets offered messages;
- is resistant to tampering;
- is critical not only to individual communicated messages, but also to the media communication as a whole.

Currently a person does not have to be only a recipient of media content, but can himself create such content and through social media, such as blogs, Twitter, social networks, Wikipedia or YouTube can share it with others. If a teacher expands media education to include creative and production activities (class or school magazine or blog, school broadcasting, school YouTube channel), students will gain a better understanding of the patterns and operation of media because they will know them from the “inside”.

The study of media and journalism

Department of ICT of the Pedagogical Faculty of the University of Ostrava offers a wide range of courses that are focused on the development of information and media competencies of students, and not only the students from the field of Information Technology in Education. Many of these courses are available to students of different fields, even from different faculties. The two main courses offered by ICT department are Basics of Media Communication and Basics of Journalism.

Students who complete the course Basics of Media Communication acquire skills for informed, active and critical work with media and their use in teaching. The individual sections of the course are focused on the process and models of communication in media and in education, history of media and media communication, media technology, functioning of

media organizations, influence and effects of media and their use in education. Students produce and present term papers which contain a detailed and critical analysis of the influence of media and the work of journalists and the possibilities of using media communication in education.

The students of this course present a specific concept of how to use articles or columns in newspapers and magazines or radio and television programs in the teaching of a selected subject. Among the concepts is a recurring use of television travelogues and historical programs in teaching geography and history, as well as language courses or a wide range of nature documentaries. The benefit of incorporating media into teaching is that students will realize that media do not have to serve as entertainment only, but also as self-education in an enjoyable way.

Students who pass the second main media course Basics of Journalism acquire skills for the production of news and current affairs articles and team work in creating school newspapers and magazines. Individual sections of the course focus on the relationship between journalism and society, the work of journalists, sources of journalistic information, selection of a subject and information retrieval, journalistic creation, editing and presentation. Students perform an information retrieval, write a news or current affairs article, and in a group, participate in the work of editors in creating a newspaper or magazine.

Cooperation in creating and editing a student newspaper, which is managed and organized by the students themselves, proved to be very positive. Students are highly motivated, perform extra tasks and have excellent results. In today's virtual world of electronic media and the Internet, a print form of the newspaper was chosen on purpose (including their own graphic design), which proved to be even more interesting and fun for the students. One of the graduates of the course is currently writing a thesis which aims to propose a methodology on how to incorporate creative and production activities of students into media education in primary schools.

Conclusion

Media education in primary and secondary schools is mostly taught as a cross-disciplinary topic. That is, various parts of media education are included differently into subjects like Czech or Civics. Students majoring in Information Technology in Education at the Department of ICT of the Pedagogical Faculty of the University of Ostrava acquire skills for teaching media education. The combination of information literacy and media education proved very effective. As it turns out, an information literate person also has a better understanding of media and can use them actively to his/her own advantage and vice versa. A person who is media literate can use media sources for acquiring, analysis and interpretation of information as well as his/her own self-education. A person's own creation is considered the hypothetical peak. Students who are developing their information and media competencies concurrently, are able to contribute to a scientific journal, as well as write a current affairs or popular science article for a school newspaper or other media. The goal of

the Department of ICT is for the pedagogy students, when they become teachers, to help their students develop the same broad scale of competencies.

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