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# **MEDIA EDUCATION – A GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPMENT**

*( A Policy Paper, prepared for UNESCO – Sector of Communication and Information)*

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the provision of media education for children and young people of *school age*. It provides an overall rationale for media education; a brief review of its development around the world; and a succinct definition of the field. It then goes on to outline a strategy for the development of media education internationally, identifying a number of component aspects. It concludes by proposing some ways in which UNESCO might support these initiatives at local, national and international levels. As such, this paper aims to put forward some *general parameters* for future actions in this field. In developing these actions, it emphasises the need to review approaches to media education deriving from different regions and cultural/linguistic areas, and to encourage global communication between the various participants.

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## 1. Why Media Education?

Almost twenty years ago, following an international meeting of experts held in Grunwald in Germany, UNESCO published a declaration making the argument for media education. The Grunwald Declaration (contained in the appendix to this paper) offers a succinct and powerful rationale that is of enduring relevance. It argues that the media are an increasingly significant and powerful force in contemporary societies; and that a coherent and systematic form of education about the mass media must be seen as an essential component – indeed, a prerequisite – of modern citizenship.

In its definition of media education, the Grunwald Declaration reflects several key emphases that continue to be shared by the majority of media educators today:

- Media education is concerned with the *full range* of media, including moving image media (film, television, video), radio and recorded music, print media (particularly newspapers and magazines), and the new digital communication technologies. It aims to develop a broad-based ‘literacy’, not just in relation to print, but also in the symbolic systems of images and sounds.
- Media education is concerned with teaching and learning *about* the media. This should not be confused with teaching *through* the media – for example, the use of television or computers as a means of teaching science, or history. Media education is not about the instrumental use of media as ‘teaching aids’: it should not be confused with educational technology or educational media.
- Media education aims to develop *both* critical understanding *and* active participation. It enables young people to interpret and make informed judgments as consumers of media; but it also enables them to become producers of media in their own right, and thereby to become more powerful participants in society. Media education is about developing young people’s critical *and* creative abilities.

Over the past twenty years, several interrelated changes – some of them foreseen in the Grunwald declaration itself - have made the argument for media education even more

urgent. The media have increasingly penetrated all areas of social life: it is now impossible to understand the operations of the political process or of the economy, or to address questions about cultural and personal identity – or indeed about education – without taking account of the role of the media. Among the most significant changes are the following:

- **Technological developments.** With the advent of multi-channel television, home video, computers and the internet – along with a range of other technologies – there has been a massive proliferation of electronic media. This has resulted in an appearance of greater choice for the consumer (although not necessarily in greater global diversity); and in the growing accessibility of opportunities for production, as the cost of technology has fallen.
- **Economic developments.** The media have been subjected to – and been a major agent in - the broader commercialisation of contemporary culture. In many countries, public service media have lost ground to commercial media; and forms of advertising, promotion and sponsorship have steadily permeated the public sphere of social and political debate. This has been the case even in countries where the media were formerly subject to strong state control and censorship.
- **Social developments.** Most social commentators agree that the contemporary world has been characterised by a growing sense of fragmentation and individualisation. Established traditions and ways of life are being eroded, and familiar hierarchies overthrown. New, more individuated forms of identity and lifestyle are being created and promoted via the media; and individuals have become more diverse – and to some extent more autonomous – in their uses and interpretations of cultural goods.
- **Globalisation.** The balance between the global and the local is changing in complex and uneven ways, both in cultural and in economic terms. Global media corporations – based in the wealthiest first world countries - dominate the marketplace; yet new technologies also permit more decentralised, localised communications, and the creation of ‘communities’ that transcend national boundaries. Meanwhile, the gap between rich and poor – both within and between nations – appears to be widening; and this is also manifested in terms of access to information and to media technologies.

However we interpret them, these developments are decidedly double-edged. They create new inequalities even as they abolish older ones. They appear to offer new choices for individuals even as they appear to foreclose and deny others. Either way, they make the nature of contemporary citizenship – the issue that is at the heart of the Grunwald declaration – significantly more complex and ambiguous.

The modern media are centrally implicated in all of these processes; and this has particular implications for children and young people. For the global media industries, the

young are the key consumers, whose tastes and preferences are frequently seen to set the trend for consumers in general. The formation and development of ‘youth culture’ – and, more recently, of a global ‘children’s culture’ – are impossible to separate from the commercial operations of the modern media. Both in research and in public debate, children are frequently seen to be most vulnerable to media influence; yet they are also seen to possess a confidence and expertise in their relations with media that are not available to the majority of adults. They are defined both as innocents in need of protection, and as a competent, ‘media-wise’ generation. Yet whichever view we adopt, the fact remains that adults are less and less able to control children’s access to the media. Whether we look to technological devices or to changes in regulatory policy, the means of control appear increasingly ineffective. The proliferation of media technology, combined with the changing social status of children, mean that children can no longer be confined in the traditional ‘secret garden’ of childhood – if indeed they ever could.

These patterns of technological and structural change in the contemporary media environment – and the emergence of what some have called ‘The Third Media Age’ – thus present significant new dangers and opportunities for young people. Digital media – and particularly the internet – significantly increase the potential for active participation; but they also create an environment of bewildering choices, not all of which can be seen as harmless. In this new situation, we are in urgent need of well-informed and sustained educational initiatives. We need to enable children to cope with the challenges posed by this new mediated environment; and we need to build upon and extend the new styles of learning and the new forms of cultural expression that the modern media make available to them. Only in this way will it be possible for today’s children to take their place as active citizens in the complex, commercially-oriented, global societies which are now emerging.

Ultimately, therefore, media education needs to be recognised as a fundamental human right. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child offers some important indications here. Article 13, for example, asserts children’s right to freedom of expression; Article 17 proclaims their rights of access to a range of media and sources of information; while Article 31 identifies broader rights to leisure and to participation in cultural life. If children are to enjoy the rights proclaimed by this Convention – and hence to informed

participation in the processes that govern their lives – media education must be seen as a fundamental entitlement for all.

## 2. The Progress of Media Education

In the two decades since the Grunwald Declaration, media education has been the focus of increasing interest and activity in many countries. Many governments have published policy statements and curriculum documents in the field; and there have been several international conferences, at which delegates from a growing number of countries have been present. UNESCO itself has supported several of these initiatives, including the 1990 conference on 'New Directions in Media Education' (Toulouse, France) and the recent meeting of experts in Vienna, Austria (Spring 2000). It has also supported the development of a network of researchers on children and media, with conferences in Paris (1997) and Sydney (2000); and the work of the International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen, which has counted media education as one of its concerns. Significant efforts have been made throughout these initiatives to develop North/South dialogue, and to involve participants from less wealthy countries.

Nevertheless, the overall picture of development has been uneven, not to say incoherent. There is a great diversity in terms of the aims and methods of media education, the participants who are involved in it, and the contexts in which it takes place. The growth of international dialogue in the field has undoubtedly been of great value; but it is not always clear that everybody is talking about the same thing.

Thus, media education can take place in a range of institutional settings, both 'formal' and 'informal'; and it can be provided by bodies from both public and private sectors (or combinations of the two). While the primary focus of interest in this paper is education for children and young people *of school age*, it should be recognised that this cannot (and perhaps should not) always be distinguished from educational initiatives aimed at adults. Thus, the range of parties and institutions involved in media education would include at least the following:

- Teachers in schools and other formal educational institutions
- Teachers in 'informal' settings, such as youth and community work

- Academics and researchers
- Activist groups, of a variety of political and moral persuasions
- Youth-led groups and organisations, often based in local communities
- Parents' groups
- Churches and other religious groups
- Media producers and companies, both commercial and non-profit
- Media regulatory bodies

These groups are clearly likely to have diverse motivations, ranging from commercial promotion to 'counter-propaganda'. Some may see media education primarily as a matter of *protection* – as a means of weaning children off something that is deemed to be fundamentally bad for them; while others see it more in terms of *preparation* – as a means of enabling children to become more active users of media.

Which of these participants has managed to gain prominence in the field clearly depends on the national and local context in which they are working. Among the key variables are the following:

- **The structure of education systems.** Education systems in some countries are much more centralised than in others. Centralisation can obviously act as a brake on change; but – if opportunities present themselves – it can also bring about change much more quickly than is possible in a decentralised system. Likewise, some systems allow a greater degree of autonomy to individual teachers than others; although even in situations of greater autonomy, factors such as the age profile of the teaching profession and the possibility of access to further training significantly affect the potential for change. In some countries also, there may be greater opportunities for change within out-of-school contexts, such as youth and community work; although here again, there is significant diversity in terms of the characteristics and aims of provision in this sector.
- **The characteristics of media systems.** It might be expected that it would be easier to find support for media education initiatives in countries with strong public sector media, and correspondingly more difficult in those with more commercially-dominated systems. On the other hand, the need for media education may be seen as more urgent in countries with more commercial systems, or in countries where domestically-produced media are disadvantaged relative to imported media (such as US television programming). Meanwhile, in some situations, public service media organisations may actually be more resistant to collaboration with 'outsiders' and more institutionally and politically constrained. The nature of the collaboration between educators and the media

industries – and the ‘balance of power’ between them – can significantly affect the quality of media education.

- **Broader political ideologies.** Education is a notoriously ‘political’ issue; and decisions about the direction of education policy often reflect broader political considerations as much as they reflect evidence about student needs or pedagogic effectiveness. For instance, in many countries, the drift of reform in recent years has taken the form of a move ‘back to basics’ – in which context, the case for new curriculum interventions such as media education tends to be much harder to sustain. Meanwhile, the political push to provide information technology in schools often seems to be driven by narrowly-defined concerns with economic effectiveness; and as such, it may be neglecting the critical questions that should be asked of these new media and the creative opportunities they can afford to students. On the other hand, some governments are now centrally committed to equalising access to new media technologies, both through schools and through community-based provision; although inequalities in this respect undoubtedly persist, both within and between nations.

Ongoing changes in each of these areas often result in highly uneven patterns of educational reform. Thus, many countries have seen instances of significant curriculum development projects in media education – often with substantial funding and high-level political support – that have not ultimately been sustained. More experienced practitioners often complain that such initiatives are ‘re-inventing the wheel’, suggesting that little has been learnt from the successes and failures of the past. Here, as in many other areas, schools themselves can remain strikingly resistant to change. Historians of educational reform frequently remark that, at least in most industrialised countries, the fundamental institutional ‘grammar’ of state schooling has changed relatively little since it began in the nineteenth century. Introducing new media technology – let alone the kinds of ‘critical thinking’ and the new pedagogies associated with media education – is almost bound to meet with considerable inertia, if not overt resistance. Meanwhile, developments in out-of-school settings are frequently short-term and piecemeal, reflecting the ever-changing political priorities that seem to inform funding policies in this area.

Educational policy-makers frequently argue (as they have been doing for decades) that the school curriculum is ‘overcrowded’, and that media education is less urgent than other new initiatives in fields such as citizenship and information technology. In response, advocates of media education assert that many of these ‘new’ areas are intimately related to media education; and that media education should be seen as a key dimension of a whole range of existing curriculum subjects. Yet the broader argument for redefining

the curriculum – for precisely the kind of ‘integrated approach’ called for in the Grunwald Declaration – seems to require an effort of imagination that few policy-makers are currently prepared to make. In this context, the implementation of media education is likely to require broad-based alliances of participants, both within and beyond formal education, and both nationally and internationally.

### **3. From Protection to Preparation**

Despite this uneven and sometimes unsatisfactory record of progress, it is possible to detect a broad historical shift in the underlying philosophy of media education – even if this shift is not always reflected in practice. Historically, media education has often begun as a defensive enterprise: its aim is to *protect* children against what are seen to be the dangers of the media. The emphasis here is on exposing the false messages and values the media are seen to purvey, and thereby encouraging students to reject or move beyond them. As it has evolved, however, media education has tended to move towards a more empowering approach. The aim here is to *prepare* children to understand and to participate actively in the media culture that surrounds them. The emphasis is on critical understanding and analysis, and (increasingly) upon media production by students themselves.

In essence, the protectionist approach seeks to arm students against the perceived dangers of the media. To be sure, these ‘dangers’ have been defined in different ways at different times and in different contexts. In some countries, the fundamental concern of early media educators was a *cultural* one – that the media represented a form of ‘low culture’ that would undermine children’s appreciation of the values and virtues of ‘high culture’. In others, the fundamental concern appears to be *moral* – that the media will teach children values and behaviours (for example, to do with sex and violence) that are deemed to be inappropriate or harmful. Finally – and especially in the forms of media education that developed in the 1970s – one can detect a *political* concern: a belief that the media are responsible for promoting false political beliefs or ideologies. In each case, media education is seen as a means of counteracting children’s apparent fascination and pleasure in the media – and hence their belief in the values the media are seen to promote. Media education will, it is assumed, lead children on to an appreciation of high

culture, to more morally healthy forms of behaviour, or to more rational, politically correct beliefs.

As in media research, there is sometimes an element of recurrence here, as new media enter the scene. For instance, the advent of the internet has seen a resurgence of many of these protectionist arguments for media education – arguments which have to some extent been superseded in respect of ‘older’ media such as television. Here, media education is yet again perceived by some as a kind of inoculation – a means of preventing contamination, if not of keeping children away from the media entirely. In this scenario, the potential benefits and pleasures of the media are neglected in favour of an exclusive – and in some instances, highly exaggerated – emphasis on the harm they are assumed to cause.

While these protectionist views of media education have been far from superseded, there has been a gradual evolution in many countries towards a less defensive approach. In general, the countries with the most ‘mature’ forms of practice in media education – that is, those which have the longest history, and the most consistent pattern of evolution – have moved well beyond protectionism. From this perspective, media education is now no longer defined as a matter of automatic opposition to students’ experiences of the media. Media education is seen here not as a form of protection, but as a form of *preparation*. It does not aim to shield young people from the influence of the media, and thereby to lead them on to ‘better things’. On the contrary, it seeks to enable them to make informed decisions on their own behalf. In broad terms, it aims to develop young people’s *understanding of*, and *participation in*, the media culture that surrounds them. In the process, it inevitably raises cultural, moral and political concerns; but it does so in a way that encourages an active, critical engagement on the part of students, rather than subservience to a predetermined position.

From this perspective, media production by students inevitably assumes a much greater significance. At least in respect of children and young people of school age – who are the focus of this paper – media education is not primarily a *vocational* enterprise. Its aim is not to train the television producers and journalists of the future: this is a task for higher education, and for the media industries themselves. Nevertheless, the increasing economic importance of the media and communications industries means that the media

are a growing area for employment. By emphasising the development of young people's creativity, and their participation in media production, media educators are enabling their voices to be heard; and in the longer term, they are also providing the basis for more democratic and inclusive forms of media production in the future.

The reasons for this shift in emphasis – from 'protection' to 'preparation' - are manifold, but the following would be among them:

- **Changing views of regulation.** To some extent, this shift is part of a broader development in thinking about the nature of media regulation. While protectionism is often driven by well-meaning, positive motivations, it can result in a situation where children's active participation in the media is restricted. As such, it can be seen to conflict with the emphasis on children's rights to information and participation (for example, in the UN Convention). Furthermore, the proliferation and technological development of the media in recent years has led to a situation in which children's access to media can no longer be so easily controlled: this is most obviously the case in relation to the internet, but it is also true of video and satellite television, for example. In this situation, the attempt to restrict children's access to media is increasingly seen to be an impossible task. Among media regulators, the emphasis is now moving decisively away from censorship, and towards 'consumer advice' – of which media education is often seen as one dimension.
- **Changing views of the media.** The notion of the media as bearers of a singular set of values and beliefs – or indeed as uniformly harmful or lacking in cultural value – is no longer so widely held. While there are obviously significant limits in the diversity of views represented in the media, the proliferation and globalisation of modern forms of communication have resulted in a more heterogeneous, even fragmented, environment. Although economic control of the media has largely become confined to a small number of global corporations, the growing importance of 'niche markets' has required producers to address an increasingly diverse range of social groupings. The participatory potential of new technologies – and particularly of the internet – has also helped to undermine the view of the media as a monolithic, centrally controlled machine; and this has made it much more possible for young people to undertake creative media production, or for teachers to do so with their students. In this context, therefore, there is a greater recognition of the benefits and opportunities afforded by the media, rather than simply of the harm they are alleged to cause.
- **Changing views of young people.** Following from the above, the notion that the media are an all-powerful 'consciousness industry' – that they can single-handedly impose false values on passive audiences – has also come into question. In the case of children, the idea that they can be seen merely as innocent victims of media effects has steadily been challenged and surpassed. This is partly a reflection of changing perspectives among academics and researchers: within some areas of psychology, and particularly within Cultural Studies, researchers have developed a much more complex view of the ways in which children make judgments about the media, and how they use the media to form their personal and social identities. This general orientation is also

supported by a growing body of work in the sociology of childhood (which itself has informed the interest in children's rights). This research does not sanction the simple-minded celebration of children's sophistication that has now become common within the media industries; but it does suggest that children are a much more autonomous and critical audience than they are conventionally assumed to be - not least by many educators themselves.

- **Changing views of teaching and learning.** Finally – and perhaps most powerfully – there has been a growing recognition among educators that the protectionist approach does not actually work in practice. Such an approach often seems to be based on the notion that teachers will simply reveal the 'truth' about the shortcomings of the media, and that the students, once they have witnessed it, will automatically give their assent. Research and experience in this field suggest that this 'evangelistic' approach represents a severe over-simplification of the complex and messy realities of educational practice. Especially when it comes to the areas with which media education is so centrally concerned - with what students see as their own cultures and their own pleasures - they may well be inclined to resist or reject what teachers tell them. And this is particularly true if such teaching is perceived to be grounded on ignorance about popular culture, or if the study of the media is being used as a covert means of gaining students' assent to positions that are seen as morally authoritarian or 'politically correct'. The recognition of these difficulties has led to the emergence of a more student-centred perspective, which begins from young people's existing knowledge and experience of media, rather than from the instructional imperatives of the teacher.

Any account of this kind inevitably runs the risk of oversimplification. Changes in the overt philosophy or rhetoric of media education are by no means necessarily reflected in educational practice; and the reasons for such changes may be as much to do with contingency – or indeed with broader changes in the social or political climate – as they are to do with the 'internal' development of practice. As will be noted in a subsequent section of this paper, there is an urgent need for information-gathering in this field, and for a more systematic comparative analysis of international developments. Perhaps above all, there is a need to assess the rhetorical claims of media educators in the light of the concrete realities of practice. Ultimately, one of the abiding weaknesses of media education – not least for those who have sought to promote its importance among policy-makers – has been the lack of systematic, detailed evidence about its effectiveness.

#### **4. A Definition of Media Education**

In a developing field such as media education, diversity is to be expected; and a global organisation such as UNESCO is bound to respect and seek to preserve such diversity. As is implied above, media education needs to begin from the perspectives and

experiences of young people themselves; and as such, it must take into account the needs and characteristics of their communities and cultures. This diversity cannot easily be accommodated within a singular model. Nevertheless, there is also a need for clarity and coherence if media education is to move beyond the stage of pioneering enthusiasm. We need authoritative definitions of its aims and methods, if only as a starting point for further debate. If policy-makers and others are to be convinced of the need for media education, they need to be sure about what it involves.

In fact, such definitions already exist. The model of media education codified in the British Film Institute's 'Curriculum Statements', published in 1989 and 1991, emerged from a twenty-year history of curriculum development in the UK; and it has been highly influential internationally. Variants of this kind of model have been developed in many countries; and the British Film Institute itself has subsequently attempted to refine and simplify it. Nevertheless, there is a striking degree of consensus about the basic parameters. This model provides a framework for the curriculum organised not in terms of objects of study, or in terms of skills or competencies, but in terms of *conceptual understandings*. These are often rendered as a set of 'key concepts' or 'aspects'. A simplified version of this model is outlined in Table 1 below.

This conceptual approach has several advantages. It does not specify a given set of facts to be learned; nor does it identify particular objects of study (a canon of prescribed texts, for example). In this respect, it enables media education to remain contemporary and responsive to students' changing interests and experiences, without becoming merely arbitrary in its selection of material. The central aim here is to provide a theoretical framework which can be applied to the whole range of contemporary media, and indeed to 'older' media such as literature as well. At least in principle, this should enable students to realise the connections between them, and to transfer insights from one area to another.

However, the key aspects are not intended as a blueprint for a media education curriculum, or a list of contents that should be 'delivered' to students. They are not hierarchically organised, nor are they intended to be addressed in isolation from each other - as though one would spend one semester on agency, followed by another on representation, and so on. On the contrary, they are seen as interdependent: each

concept is a possible point of entry to a given area of media education, which necessarily invokes all the others. As such, they provide a way of organising one's thinking about any activity or unit of work which might be undertaken in media education - and it should be emphasised that they can be applied as much to *creative* activities (such as taking photographs) as they can to *analytical* ones (such as studying advertising or the news).

## **TABLE 1: KEY ASPECTS OF MEDIA EDUCATION**

### ***Media Agencies***

#### ***Who is communicating what and why?***

Who produces a text; roles in the production process; media institutions; economics and ideology; intentions and results.

### ***Media Categories***

#### ***What type of text is it?***

Different media (television, radio, cinema, etc.); forms (documentary, advertising, etc.); genres (science fiction, soap opera, etc.); other ways of categorising texts; how categorisation relates to understanding.

### ***Media Technologies***

#### ***How is it produced?***

What kinds of technologies are available to whom; how to use them; the differences they make to the production process as well as the final product.

### ***Media Languages***

#### ***How do we know what it means?***

How the media produce meanings; codes and conventions; narrative structures.

### ***Media Audiences***

#### ***Who receives it, and what sense do they make of it?***

How audiences are identified, constructed, addressed and reached; how audiences find, choose, consume and respond to texts.

## ***Media Representations***

### ***How does it present its subject?***

The relation between media texts and actual places, people, events, ideas; stereotyping and its consequences.

This conceptual model and others like it have informed curriculum development in several countries around the world; and this has particularly been the case in countries with the longest history of practice in the field. However, there is a need to undertake a systematic comparison between such models and frameworks, and to address some of the broader questions they raise. The following are among the questions that have begun to be raised in debates among practitioners, and in classroom research, over the past ten years:

- To what extent is this model sufficiently comprehensive – or indeed unnecessarily elaborate? Should it not be extended (for instance, in the light of technological change) or can it be further simplified?
- To what extent does this model ignore questions about cultural or aesthetic value? How might media education address such questions?
- Should a model such as this also specify the skills or competencies students are expected to develop? In what terms might this be achieved?
- On what basis should we evaluate or assess students' understanding of these key aspects? How can we identify evidence of progression in students' learning?
- What are the specific difficulties in evaluating students' creative production work in this respect? How does 'theory' (or media analysis) relate to 'practice' (media production)?
- How do students acquire these conceptual understandings of the media? How do they relate to their existing knowledge and understanding?
- To what extent is this conceptual model unduly rationalistic? How far, and in what ways, should media education also take account of students' *affective* relationships with media?
- What can be learned in this respect from observing independent groups of young people teaching and learning from each other?
- And, perhaps above all, how do we know whether media education actually makes any difference?

Ultimately, despite their limitations, models and definitions of this kind provide an important basis for the 'internal' development of the field; as well as providing resources for dialogue with 'external' parties such as other subject teachers, educational policy makers, media institutions and parents' organisations. Here again, there is a particular need for systematic investigation, sharing of good practice and informed international dialogue.

## 5. Elements of a Strategy

Despite the growing significance of the media, and the urgency of the case for media education, progress in this field has generally been slow or uneven. Educational innovation of this kind is a complex process, and requires a range of strategies and tactics. It cannot be mandated, and it will not be brought about simply through the force or logic of the argument.

Experience in several countries suggests that promoting and developing media education depends upon the presence of a series of inter-dependent elements, and on partnerships between a range of interested parties. Some of these will function on an international level, some on a national level and some on a local level. Any intervention must necessarily take account of the specific factors in play at each level, and the shifting relationships between them. These elements should include the following.

- **Policy interventions.** There is an ongoing need for clear, coherent and authoritative documents that define media education and provide a rationale for its implementation. The Grunwald Declaration is one example of such an international document, which can be effectively utilised at a national level by those seeking to influence educational policy. Such documents obviously need to command general assent; to be succinct and strongly argued; and to be widely publicised and distributed. A new document of this type, which reflects recent changes and likely future developments in the media, is now urgently required. If it is to be effective, any international document or policy statement of this kind will also need to be followed up with an ongoing process of monitoring at a national level.
- **Curriculum frameworks.** In addition to broad statements of purpose, there is a need for more specific documentation outlining frameworks for curriculum development and practice. The model described in the previous section of this paper offers one such framework; and it has subsequently been adapted and developed in various ways in different contexts. In the current climate of educational policy-making in many countries, a document of this kind would need to include: a clear model of learning progression, appropriate to specific curriculum locations; details of specific learning outcomes,

expressed in terms of competencies; criteria and procedures for evaluation and assessment; and, in some instances, specific attainment targets for given stages. Ideally, any such document will need to allow considerable opportunity for flexibility and teacher autonomy, while nevertheless ensuring comparability and agreed standards. Documents of this kind certainly exist, although they remain to be drawn together, evaluated and synthesised.

- **Professional training for teachers and other practitioners.** Well-intended documents and frameworks are worthless without trained staff to implement them. Elements of training in media education should be included in initial and in-service training programmes, and be available as part of teachers' ongoing professional development. Teachers should be rewarded for undertaking training, both by additional remuneration and by appropriate certification. Given the complexity of the field, any such training should be extensive and sustained: one-off conferences and short courses are obviously of value for those new to the field, but there should be flexible opportunities to lead on to more in-depth training, for example at Master's level. In line with best practice in professional development, such training should include opportunities to undertake practically-based investigations, and offer provision for the accreditation of prior learning. Distance learning may be appropriate in many circumstances, but this should be complemented by sustained opportunities for face-to-face tuition. (It should be emphasised that the term 'teachers' here includes those who work with young people in more informal settings, such as youth and community projects. While circumstances vary, such individuals are often even more inadequately provided with opportunities for training and professional development.)
- **Involvement of the media industries.** The media are, in many respects, the most obvious vehicle for media education: in some respects, they are bound to teach the skills and competencies that are needed to interpret them. However, media producers often need to be convinced of their responsibility to provide media education, both 'informally' through their own work, and through partnerships with teachers and other education providers. Collaboration between teachers and media producers has obvious benefits, for instance in terms of accessing appropriate teaching resources, informing teachers and students of contemporary developments within the media industries, and addressing students' vocational ambitions. This can take the form of co-operative projects, visits, placements and work-shadowing, the production of teaching materials, screenings and so on. Such activities are not necessarily incompatible with commercial interests; although they should not be seen simply as an opportunity for media producers to advertise their work, or as a form of 'public relations'. Other bodies that might have a role to play in this respect would include industry regulatory bodies and relevant government departments.
- **Involvement of parents.** If media education is to prove relevant and applicable beyond the classroom, parents and caregivers clearly have a vital role to play. Many parents express concern about the media to which their children are exposed, and feel relatively powerless to intervene. Because they themselves have had little media education, they believe they have little understanding about the media. If parents are to be involved, they too need to be recruited and empowered as active participants, rather than simply being told what they should or should not be doing; and any educational initiatives

aimed at parents need to take account both of cultural differences and of the sometimes difficult realities of child-rearing. While there are examples of good practice in this field that might be productively shared and disseminated more widely, this is generally an area whose potential has been little explored.

- **Involvement of youth groups.** The provision of facilities, training and support for more or less independent groups of young people is a further key dimension of media education. Such groups may come together in formal school settings, but they are likely to function more effectively in less formal situations; and (as noted above), media educators may have a great deal to learn from the kinds of 'peer education' that are developed in such contexts. There is a great potential for young media professionals to be involved in such work, particularly with disadvantaged groups who might not otherwise gain access to the media. While there is a long history of practice in this field, there has been relatively little documentation or dialogue among practitioners; and training opportunities are uneven and often quite inadequate. Such groups can obviously benefit greatly from networking with peers in similar situations; and there is an urgent need to establish channels whereby young people's work in a range of media can be distributed and exhibited – not least via the mainstream media.
- **Teaching materials and resources.** Despite the changing and sometimes ephemeral nature of the content of media education, teaching materials can have a long shelf-life if they are carefully and professionally produced. They can also serve as a form of training in themselves, particularly where they are supported by appropriate documentation; and there can be significant benefits in providing additional training to support their use. Such materials should be of high quality, not necessarily in terms of glossy production values but more in terms of the research and evaluation that has informed their production. More broadly, it is important to specify the levels of resourcing that are required for effective practice: media education does not by any means have to be a 'high tech' enterprise, but it should at least reflect the levels of access that students have to media technology outside the school environment.
- **Self-organisation by practitioners.** All those involved in the media education partnership - teachers, media producers, parents and young people - need ongoing opportunities to share experiences and evidence from practice, to exchange resources and to collaborate on producing new curriculum plans and projects. In the case of teachers, such informal opportunities may be offered through a local branch of a subject association; and if such associations are democratically organised, and remain responsive to the perspectives of practising teachers, they can have a powerful voice in national debates about educational policy. Such organisations may also sponsor publications written by and for teachers, in-service training events and conferences, and electronic networking between teachers and schools. However, there is also a need for associations that precisely seek to bring together the various partners involved, and to promote dialogue between them.
- **Research and evaluation.** Media education practice should obviously reflect current theoretical advances in our understanding of young people's relationships with media, and of pedagogy. In the case of the former, there are now quite well-established networks of media researchers concerned with such issues; although there needs to be

greater dialogue between these academic groups and educators who work directly with young people. In terms of pedagogy, the previous sections of this paper have identified a number of issues that are in need of more systematic and sustained research. In broad terms, these might include: the nature of student learning about the media; the relations between 'conceptual' and 'affective' dimensions of media education; and the relations between 'theory' and 'practice'. In particular, there is a need to assess the relationship between students' experiences of media education in schools, and their uses and interpretations of media outside school. Such research may well begin in the context of professional development courses, or in local or national teachers' associations. It should involve academics working in collaboration with teachers themselves

- **International exchange and dialogue.** While several of the above activities are more appropriately organised on a national or local level, several of them can gain significantly from international dialogue. Networks (such as the World Council on Media Education) have begun to develop in this field, although their membership is unevenly distributed. Much of the international discussion is dominated by those from English-speaking countries, although there is much that media educators in those countries could learn from the rather different traditions of the developing countries of the South. In addition, there is a need for such dialogues and exchanges to be sustained, rather than merely in the form of one-off conferences taking place every few years. International exchange will be much less superficial if practitioners have more sustained opportunities to visit each other's countries, for example through a system of longer-term internships.

It should be emphasised here that these are all inter-related elements within an overall strategy. If any one of these is absent or weakened, it puts the entire field at risk. For instance, policy documentation or curriculum frameworks in the absence of professional development can be merely a matter of empty rhetoric. Professional development and self-organisation by teachers is fairly meaningless if there are no clear curriculum frameworks for them to work within. Policy, teaching and research should be interconnected: development in each area should support development in the others.

## **6. Policy Recommendations for UNESCO**

As a global organisation, UNESCO is in a unique position to support some of these initiatives, both directly and indirectly. This closing section will pull together and develop some of the policy recommendations implicit in this paper. At this relatively early stage, this is necessarily a provisional statement. Further consultation with interested parties will be required; and of course any initiatives UNESCO decides to pursue will be dependent upon consultation and collaboration with other relevant bodies.

In the **short term** (6 months), two initiatives will be undertaken in fulfillment of the remainder of the current author's contract:

- Drafting of a publication aimed at teachers. This is intended to provide an introductory guide to media education, covering the following key questions: why (rationales for media education); what (definitions of media education); where (curricular and institutional locations); and how (issues of pedagogy and practice).
- Drafting of a short publication aimed at students/young people in the 10-14 age group. This will address questions suggested by the 'key aspects' outlined in section 4 of this paper, for instance: agency (who owns the media, and how do they work?); representation (how do the media represent the world, and particular social groups within it?); language (how do media create meanings?); audiences (how do people use and interpret media?). Following consultation with the reading group, it may be decided to focus this publication on one key area of the media.

In the **medium term** (18 months), the following initiatives might be pursued:

- The convening of a small, high-level international colloquium of experts in the field, leading to the agreement of a declaration re-stating and re-defining the case for media education in 'The Third Media Age', for circulation to national education ministries and other relevant bodies.
- The compilation of examples of national and regional curriculum frameworks, and the commissioning of an evaluation report identifying similarities and differences and offering guidance for those drawing up such frameworks in the future.
- The establishment of a website which will facilitate the sharing of resources by teachers, and the sharing of students' work in a range of media. Support would need to be given here for translation, since existing web resources on media education are heavily English-language-dominated.
- The establishment of a parallel website for young people involved in media production. This would serve as a hub for links to sites produced by young people themselves; and it would include opportunities for young people to engage directly in debate and exchange, for example via 'chat rooms'.
- The development of connections relating to media education between UNESCO's network of schools, which will facilitate exchanges and dialogues between students. These connections could usefully be documented by researchers and written up and published for wider dissemination.
- The production of further publications in specific aspects of media education, aimed at teachers, parents and students.

Over the **longer term** (2-3 years), UNESCO should consider establishing an International Clearinghouse on Media Education, in parallel with the International Clearinghouse on

Children and Violence on the Screen. This could be the focus for a range of ongoing initiatives, which might include:

- An annual international summer institute in media education, aimed at national experts in the field, who will be encouraged to spread their expertise via 'cascade' training. Specific support would need to be provided for delegates from less wealthy countries.
- An annual international workshop/festival for youth groups involved in media production. This would involve exhibitions/screenings of work and discussion of relevant issues (e. g. training, evaluation, exhibition and distribution).
- The development of an accessible international collection of teaching and learning resources in media education; and support for those involved in translating or adapting existing resources to specific national contexts.
- The commissioning of a study specifically focusing on media education with parents. This would collate and evaluate existing training resources, and review research on the role of parents and families in the development of media literacy.
- Publication of a regular newsletter and/or a yearbook containing documented accounts of good practice and new developments in the field.
- In addition, UNESCO might offer direct financial support for the following, perhaps in collaboration with an international foundation or charitable trust:
  - A grants scheme for national or local teachers' groups working on specific research and development projects.
  - International internships and teacher exchanges, in order to facilitate more in-depth sharing of expertise. Again, emphasis would be placed here on supporting applicants from poorer countries.
  - Educational research leading to the production of documented and evaluated accounts of practice, and models of learning progression.

This paper has set out some general parameters for future actions in this field. In developing these actions, UNESCO will be reviewing approaches to media education deriving from different regions and cultural/linguistic areas, and encouraging global communication between the various participants.

Feedback on any aspects of this paper are most welcome, and should be directed in the first instance to the author: Professor David Buckingham, Director, Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL, England. E-mail: [d.buckingham@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:d.buckingham@ioe.ac.uk)

## **APPENDIX: UNESCO Declaration on Media Education**

Issued by the representatives of 19 nations at UNESCO's 1982 International Symposium on Media Education at Grunwald, Germany.

We live in a world where media are omnipresent: an increasing number of people spend a great deal of time watching television, reading newspapers and magazines, playing records and listening to the radio. In some countries, for example, children already spend more time watching television than they do attending school.

Rather than condemn or endorse the undoubted power of the 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. The role of communication and media in the process of development should not be underestimated, nor the function of media as instruments for the citizen's active participation in society. Political and educational systems need to recognise their obligations to promote in their citizens a critical understanding of the phenomena of communication.

Regrettably most formal and non-formal educational systems do little to promote media education or education for communication. Too often the gap between the educational experience they offer and the real world in which people live is disturbingly wide. But if the arguments for media education as a preparation for responsible citizenship are formidable now, in the very near future with the development of communication technology such as satellite broadcasting, two-way cable systems, television data systems, video cassette and disc materials, they ought to be irresistible, given the increasing degree of choice in media consumption resulting from these developments.

Responsible educators will not ignore these developments, but will work alongside their students in understanding them and making sense of such consequences as the rapid development of two-way communication and the ensuing individualisation and access to information.

This is not to underestimate the impact on cultural identity of the flow of information and ideas between cultures by the mass media.

The school and the family share the responsibility of preparing the young person for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds. Children and adults need to be literate in all three of these symbolic systems, and this will require some reassessment of educational priorities. Such a reassessment might well result in an integrated approach to the teaching of language and communication.

Media education will be most effective when parents, teachers, media personnel and decision-makers all acknowledge that they have a role to play in developing greater critical awareness among listeners, viewers and readers. The greater integration of educational and communications systems would undoubtedly be an important step towards more effective education.

We therefore call on the competent authorities to:

- initiate and support comprehensive media education programs – from pre-school to university level, and in adult education – the purpose of which is to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes which will encourage the growth of critical awareness and, consequently, of greater competence among the users of electronic and print media. Ideally, such programs should include the analysis of media products, the use of media as means of creative expression, and effective use of and participation in media channels;
- develop training courses for teachers and intermediaries both to increase their knowledge and understanding of the media and train them in appropriate teaching methods, which would take into account the already considerable but fragmented acquaintance with media already possessed by many students;
- stimulate research and development activities for the benefit of media education, from such domains as psychology, sociology, and communication science;
- support and strengthen the actions undertaken or envisaged by UNESCO and which aim at encouraging international cooperation in media education.

*Grunwald, Federal Republic of Germany, 22 January 1982*

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