

# Communication and New Literacies in the multicultural world

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**Abstract:** Knowledge and skills for international and intercultural interaction are needed in nearly all fields. This is why multicultural studies should be made an integral part not only of general education but also of adult and vocational education and training. In an intercultural world communication necessarily mediates different values and cultural behaviours. Great civilizations and cultures have very different patterns of communication and use different senses in a different way. In consequence, if a truly global information society is to be created, more attention should be given to the diversity of cultures and the co-existence of different civilizations and cultures.. Digital literacy as media literacy aims to develop both critical understanding of and active participation in the media. Using a computer requires diverse and complex previous knowledge. It also introduces the individual and humanity to new contexts, which demands mental, intellectual, profound and complex changes. Creativity and culture become essential raw materials for the knowledge economy.

**Keywords:** Global education; creativity; media literacy; digital competence; critical thinking

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. 2. Digital literacy. 3. Media literacy and global education in teaching. 3.1. «Media civilised» citizens. 4. References.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is consolidated by the extraordinary invasion of education and learning by new technologies, especially the Internet. The development of communication and information technologies makes it possible for distance teaching institutions to strengthen their position in the educational landscape. They also pave the way for lifelong education for all and at the same time are spreading the traditional universities, more and more of which use distance teaching methods in their activities, thereby making the distinction between the two types of institutions virtually meaningless. There are an increasing number of university networks of this kind all over the world, and the use of computers in the learning process, access to the Internet by students as a vehicle for self-directed learning, educational broadcasting and video-conferencing are all being stepped by.

The philosophy of e-learning focuses on the individual learner although it recognizes that most learning is social. In the past training has organized itself much for the convenience and needs of instructors, institutions, and bureaucracies. Now eLearning is the convergence of learning and networks, the Internet. New university systems are being developed to new global needs (Utsumi–Varis–Knight–Method–Pelton, 2001). The experience and critical function of the traditional universities is central in the efforts to create new e-learning environments.

Open educational resources (OER) are an Internet empowered worldwide community effort to create an education commons. The term «open educational resources» was first adopted at UNESCO's 2002 Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Open educational resources are educational materials and resources offered freely and openly for anyone to use and under some licenses to remix, improve and redistribute. Open educational resources include:

—*Learning content*: full courses, course materials, content modules, learning objects, collections, and journals.

—*Tools*: Software to support the creation, delivery, use and improvement of open learning content including searching and organization of content, content and learning management systems, content development tools, and on-line learning communities.

—*Implementation resources*: Intellectual property licenses to promote open publishing of materials, design-principles, and localization of content.

According to the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning higher education institutions worldwide face significant challenges related to providing increased access, while containing or reducing costs. Meeting increasing and increasingly varied demand for quality higher education is an important consideration in policy debate and institutional development in many countries. New developments in higher education —from virtual universities and cross-border education to e-learning,

blended learning and open educational resources— all speak to the efforts on the part of the traditional higher education community, as well as new providers, to address the challenges they face in increasing provision. (Unesco International Institute for Educational Planning, 2005).

The UNESCO open source movement has potential for higher education. Higher education is based upon a collegial sharing of information and new discoveries through the peer-reviewed academic publication process, which supports the sharing of knowledge. The development of the Internet and Linux operating system «emerged from professionals —inside and outside of higher education— who support open-source values and processes.

The term, «Open Educational Resources», was originally defined by UNESCO as follows as the open provision of educational resources, enabled by information and communication technologies, for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes. In UNESCO's view, open source courseware, whether full course materials or course elements, constitutes an important resource to higher education institutions, teaching staff and learners. However, if there is little or no awareness of availability, open educational resources cannot be exploited, and even with awareness of availability, there are challenges and barriers to their effective use. Raising awareness and supporting informed discussion and debate can contribute to promoting informed decision making on the part of current and potential users and providers of openly available course content.

The new literacies can be approached as functional literacies in the same way as traditional reading, writing and calculating. The new abilities are believed to have a strong correlation with the traditional ones but in fact seem to do so much less than expected (Aunion, 2009). The evaluation tools are quite advanced in assessment of access (MeAC, 2007) and information literacy competence standards (ACRL, 2000), for example. But the assessment of media and digital literacy still requires a lot of research work.

In a broad sense the concept of digital literacy is a way of thinking but it can also be understood as complementary to the concept of media education and even synonymous with media literacy. Digital literacy as media literacy aims to develop both critical understanding of and active participation in the media. Digital and media literacy is about developing people's critical and creative abilities. Using a computer requires diverse and complex previous knowledge. It also introduces the individual and humanity to new contexts, which demands mental, intellectual, profound and complex changes. In essence, digital literacy is a complicated process that consists of acquiring a new *tekne*, ability of art or craft. Creativity and culture become essential raw materials for the knowledge economy (Varis, 2008).

## 2. DIGITAL LITERACY

It is widely understood that the most important skills of the future would be communication skills. Today everyone is able to access vast amounts of data without a mediator. Critical thinking skills are needed as a productive and positive activity. Critical thinkers see the future as open and malleable, not as closed and fixed. They are aware of the diversity of values, behaviours, social structures, and artistic forms in the world. Critical thinking is a process, not an outcome, and it is emotive as well as rational.

In my understanding we face three kinds of problems. First we have to try to understand what is the learning process of becoming literate and what does communication competence and media skills mean in the information society. Second, we have to analyse the increasing neo-illiteracy. Third, we should discuss of what kind of skills should we give to the citizens now as compared to the earlier skills of writing and reading.

In an intercultural world communication necessarily mediates different values and cultural behaviours. Great civilizations and cultures have very different patterns of communication and use different senses in a different way. In consequence, if a truly global information society is to be created, more attention should be given to the diversity of cultures and the co-existence of different civilizations and cultures.

Media literacy has been defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms. Media literacy is a concept whose broad definition and range of applications lead to diverse approaches, creating some intriguing conflicts and tensions. Educators and scholars with disciplinary backgrounds in media studies, the fine and performing arts, history, psychology and sociology, education, and literary analysis each may vigorously defend one's own understanding of what it means to access, analyze, evaluate, or create media texts without a full awareness of the extent of complexity, depth or integrity of various other approaches (Hobbs, 1998).

The concept of digital literacy in a broad sense is a way of thinking but it can also be understood as complementary to the concept of media education and even synonymous with media literacy. Digital literacy as media literacy aims to develop both critical understanding of and active participation in the media. In the discussions in UNESCO Communication and Information Sector, for example, digital literacy is understood to enable people to interpret and make informed judgements as users of information supports and sources and it also enables them to become producers of media in their own right. Digital and media literacy is about developing people's critical and creative abilities.

The challenges to peace and open, multicultural communication can be characterized by the transition from an industrial society to an information society with the need of digital competences. The dynamics of globalization, mobility and pluralism result in

a multicultural world. A higher degree of individual flexibility in combination with the need for tolerance and responsibility are connected to the demand for sustainable development. The promotion of higher quality and equal educational opportunities become central issues of educational institutions.

In order to learn new technologies and become digitally literate new forms of learning paths have to be developed utilizing all forms of learning, especially at work and non-formal environments. At the same time special attention should be given to teacher education in information and communication skills and competences. The period of transition that we are now living differs from the periods of change of older dominant media. Traditional print and electronic media were introduced within a period of reasonable length and when we moved to the active use of a new form of communication, we could also have a rough estimation of the economic and social impacts of it, and train new professionals for the media and support people for the institutions. Now different forms of communication and technologies integrate and converge with a speed that hardly anyone has the time or ability to assess all of the consequences, real possibilities, or problems. In a positive sense, people may be able to speak more directly to each other without former restrictions.

The cultural dimension in the communication and technology applications bring also the dimension of emotions and affection and the spirit of sharing and caring to the process. The social dimension require inclusive policies. Internet does not automatically promote social understanding and integration. In an intercultural world communication necessarily mediates different values and cultural behaviours. Great civilizations and cultures have very different patterns of communication and use different senses in a different way. In consequence, if a truly global information society is to be created, more attention should be given to the diversity of cultures and the co-existence of different civilizations and cultures.

The European Union Digital Literacy Expert Group proposed in 2007 concrete measures to evaluate and promote digital literacy. The Group concluded in 2008 that connectedness in the digital world is increasingly becoming integrated with other forms of social and societal interaction. Questions of digital and media literacy and e-inclusion can no longer be artificially separated from wider questions of social inclusion or engaged citizenship. As 'quality of use' becomes a dominant theme, it will be necessary to develop appropriate criteria, evaluation methodologies and benchmarks that can be used effectively to target resources to areas of need and to measure impact and value for money.

The Group recommended to develop and use appropriate evaluation and impact assessment frameworks including more socioeconomic background variables and more indicators related to motivation, critical thinking and quality of use. It also supported research leading to the development of more sophisticated evaluation and benchmarking tools for digital and media literacy programmes, and critical academic research.

Our study «Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe» in 2008 pointed out that the new digital technologies present unprecedented opportunities for far wider participation in the continuing development of Europe's cultural heritage and civil traditions in a global context. At the same time however, these technologies offer profitable opportunities for misinformation, unwanted surveillance, abuse of the vulnerable and infantilization of public discourse. The rapid development of digital technologies has thus made more urgent an issue that has been pressing for some time: the need for European citizens to fully understand the means by which information, ideas and opinions are now created, circulated and shared in modern societies: in other words, for a media literate population.

Promoting media literacy among European citizens has become a strategic and integrationist objective for the whole of Europe. A fundamental requirement for the promotion of this new capacity is to have a suitable model for media literacy, and to know all its dimensions, its strategic value and the specific benefits that it can bring to the development of information society in Europe. The question facing the European Commission, therefore, is what can be offered at Commission level that will add value and encouragement to National efforts, diverse as these are. Using this model, we will describe the existing and possible approaches to media literacy and their implications for a policy of promotion and support.

The skills related to media literacy can be summarised in four areas of ability: *access, analysis, evaluation and creative production*. All of these skills boost aspects of personal development: *consciousness, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities*.

When considering other elements that help to define the field of media literacy conceptually and thematically, one must remember that it is the result of a process of learning (and teaching) in any given context, but particularly in formal, informal, social, family and media settings. This multi-contextual process leads to the acquisition of specific abilities and competences, in addition to attitudes and values. This process is known as *media education*.

Media literacy should not be treated as an isolated or independent skill. On the contrary, it is a skill that involves and encompasses other skills and forms of literacy: *reading and writing literacy, audiovisual literacy* (often referred to as image or visual literacy) and *digital or information literacy*.

Furthermore, media literacy is a necessary part of *active citizenship* and is key to the full development of *freedom of expression* and the *right to information*. It is therefore an essential part of *participative democracy* 29 and *intercultural dialogue*.

It is convenient to develop with greater precision the different components of the media literacy and digital literacy abilities. We have distinguished between operative, cognitive, and social abilities:

a) Operative or technical abilities – that is, the ones related to the technical devices - include capacities related to the comprehension and use of these instruments, as

well as others that are developed in order to adapt these tools to the specific users and their needs. However, due to their very nature, technical abilities include some aspects related to certain decoding capacities (especially interfaces) and of personal appropriation – for specific ends - of the functionalities – and of the interfaces, that media tools have. From this point of view, they could to some extent be integrated in the cognitive field. However, given their relative simplicity, we prefer to see these as belonging to the operative field.

b) Cognitive abilities, include capacities related to the production of meaning that affect media texts (messages) and their signification. In general, they are the abilities of capturing, assimilating and producing information; they include also the use of this information for generating outlines and models of comprehension that allow to obtain an appropriate diagnosis of the external environment and to use the information obtained for strategies oriented by individuals' actions: problem-solving, strategies of creation and production of meaning, etc.

c) Finally, communicative and social abilities are the result of applying technical and cognitive abilities in the development of communication and social relations. These abilities allow possibilities that range from a simple contact to the creation of complex cooperation and collaboration strategies that use media tools as their base.

Another relevant summary has been given by Henry Jenkins and his colleagues for the Macarthur Foundation (2007). They found that according to a recent study from the Pew Internet & American Life project (Lenhardt & Madden., 2005), more than one-half of all teens have created media content, and roughly one third of teens who use the Internet have shared content they produced. In many cases, these teens are actively involved in what we are calling *participatory cultures*. According to them a participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).

Jenkins identifies the following forms of participatory culture: affiliations (memberships in online communities), expressions (producing new creative forms), collaborative problem-solving (working together in teams), circulations (shaping the flow of media, the participation gap (the unequal access to the opportunities), the transparency problem (the challenges young people face in learning to see clearly the ways that media shape perceptions of the world), and the ethics challenge.

### 3. MEDIA LITERACY AND GLOBAL EDUCATION IN TEACHING

Today, knowledge and skills for international and intercultural interaction are needed in nearly all fields. This is why multicultural studies should be made an integral part not only of general education but also of adult and vocational education and training. It is essential to consolidate global education in the curricula, teaching and operational cultures of schools and vocational institutes. Instruction must offer tools for finding out the causes and effects of different phenomena and for drawing conclusions, which at its best leads to growth into active, critical and mediacritical world citizens.

For global education to be realised, it must be planned, analytical and systematic. Good planning will facilitate and clarify the currently somewhat diffused global education in schools. Multiculturalism and global education constitute an increasingly important part of teachers' professional competence. Global education must be made part of the school everyday and operational culture, lest it remain merely rhetoric and a topic of theme days. Safeguarding high-quality global education requires feasible plans, effective methods, clear objectives and systematic evaluation. Global education must permeate education at all levels, it must be equitably available to all, and it must be comprehensive and rich in content.

Internationalism may either be the object of teaching/learning or a means of teaching/learning. The substance of different teaching subjects highlight the shared features and the differences of cultures and international pupil/student exchanges add experiential knowledge and understanding. Methods and procedures themselves can sustain the principles of peace education, inclusion and tolerance. Joint projects, problem-solving, a discussive and attentive atmosphere and democratic decision-making, on their part, train for respect of human value and human rights and for cooperation. Global education is motivating; at its best it gives room for pupils' and students' own ideas. Similarly motivating are opportunities offered by visits and exchange programmes to get to know different cultures.

The process from literacy to media literacy includes abilities: to communicate by means of different media, be they verbal, visual, oral, auditive, digital, iconographic or any combination of these media literacy relates to socio-cultural frames of reference and to the competence required in the midst of cultural change

#### 3.1 «MEDIA CIVILISED» CITIZENS

Media education is an important part of the Finnish teaching and education system. It is carried out in day-care centres, elementary schools and upper secondary education. Media education is not a subject but a point of emphasis in teaching and



education. The training of people in the education and teaching field is constantly being developed because of the evolution of media and the need for new media skills.

Media education research is a recent endeavour in Finland. By nature, the research is multidisciplinary: related research is being done for instance in the departments of humanities, social and educational sciences and information research. In Finland, universities emphasize the different points of view of various sciences and media education centres, which offer studies as a minor subject or as separate courses, have originated within universities. The challenge of developing media education study modules is the fact that they are often project-financed.

Finland is regarded as one of the model countries when it comes to education. The school system which guarantees all children and young people an equal opportunity for free of charge basic education near one's home has been listed as a key factor behind the success. Also, the high educational standard of teachers, the high authority of the individual schools and teachers in the implementing of teaching and the significant role of the co-operation between home and school are all considered important factors that benefit the learning of students.

Students in Finnish schools have ranked among the top entries in the international PISA-study for years. PISA is an assessment program coordinated by OECD. The program generates information on the skills level of 15-year old people in areas of literacy, mathematics and natural sciences. Although the results are good, the developers have been concerned about the varying level of information technology equipment in schools and the use of information technology, as the use of technology in schools has decreased while home use is increasing. To further the use of technology, a considerable amount of both free of charge and commercial digital teaching materials have been developed by several parties that specialize in developing education.

National and regional development projects have been initiated and continuing education has been increased to activate the use of technologies in schools. In 2008, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Board of Education started a project to utilize information and communications technology in teaching and studies. The vision of the «Information and communications technology in everyday school work»-project is that in the year 2011, schools in Finland will be equipped with innovative and creative operating models and practices that can be used in teaching information and communications technology and the utilization of digital media.

In the compulsory or upper secondary school curriculum ratified in 2004, media education has been integrated into one cross-curricular theme. Cross-curricular themes are points of emphasis in teaching and education that include content which is connected to many different subjects. They are unifying themes in teaching and education. The themes are also used to meet the contemporary educational challenges. When drafting

school and municipality-specific curricula, these themes are to be included in common and elective subjects and they are to be visible in the operating culture of the school.

In basic education the cross-curricular subject media education is called communications and media skills. The other cross-curricular themes in basic education are called growing as a human being, cultural identity and internationality, committed citizenship and entrepreneurship, responsibility for the environment, well-being and a sustainable future, security and traffic and man and technology.

The media education content of the upper secondary school curriculum is part of a cross-curricular theme called communication and media competence. In addition to that theme, the cross-curricular themes common to all upper secondary schools are active citizenship and entrepreneurship, well-being and security, sustainable growth, cultural identity and cultural knowledge.

There are major challenges for development of working-life skills that are not bound to any continent or historical tradition but globally equip students with skills that enable them to build up their own future and life in global and multicultural environment. Some educational institutes are already expanding out of the geographical borders to global actors on the field when utilizing e-learning and possibilities of ICT. Learning community and tutors may be distributed in various countries and cultures. The trend is also towards examinations and qualifications of skills that are internationally recognized.

With the steep rise of multiculturalism, there is an increasing need for people to be able to deal effectively and competently with the diversity of race, culture and ethnicity. In general terms, one's ability to deal effectively and appropriately with diversity is referred to as intercultural competence (ICC).

Intercultural competence is a relatively new concept and there has been no consensus about it so far. The concept of intercultural competence is also referred to with different terms; some refer to it as multicultural competence while others call it cross-cultural competence. Traditionally speaking intercultural competence or competence in general is often divided into three main components:

1. Knowledge: also known as cognitive factors
2. Motivation: also known as attitude
3. Skills: also known as competence in social relations and communication behavior

Intercultural competence scholars consider Knowledge, Attitude and Skills to be the key components of ICC and each of these components alone is not sufficient to achieve intercultural competence. Overall, the process of intercultural learning is intense for numerous reasons and its content can be difficult to grasp. Firstly, it requires learners to reflect upon matters with which they have had little firsthand experience. Secondly, unlike more conventional approaches to education, which tend to emphasize depersonalized forms of cognitive learning and knowledge acquisition,

it includes highly personalized behavioral and affective learning, self-reflection, and direct experience with cultural differences. Thirdly, «learning-how-to-learn», a process-oriented pedagogy, replaces learning facts, a product-oriented pedagogy, as a major goal. Fourthly, intercultural education involves epistemological explorations regarding alternative ways of knowing and validating what we know, i.e. the meaning of truth and reality (Paige, 1993).

Additionally, becoming inter-culturally competent demands a wide range of culture-general knowledge from peoples' behavioral repertoires and people are also required to apply that knowledge to the culture that they interact with. People also have to be emotionally and skillfully responsive with various ranges of choices in order to act competently depending on the limitations of any given situation. They also have to have extensive intercultural interaction experiences and have the know-how of adjusting to different patterns of thinking and behaving.

There is a long tradition of international cooperation in the field of higher education. It is evident that the common global challenges are leading to a intensified regional and international cooperation also in the field of skills. Good example of this is the growing emphasis on skills and competencies in the common policy of the European Union. Another example is the intensified global cooperation within the framework of skills competitions. International skills competitions offer an excellent tool for the analysis of the common future needs of industry and societies all over the world, for the determination of the key skills needed in different trades, for cooperation between skills and working life and for improving the quality of for skills by transferring good practices and new innovations and by giving a possibility to international benchmarking. The number of member countries of the WorldSkills International, the organization responsible for the skills competitions of young professionals, has gradually increased, being at the moment 48. The members represent countries from all continents and from industrial to newly industrialized and less developed countries.

The challenge now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to bring together scientists, public authorities, businesses, academics, civil society organizations and other interested groups and stakeholders to understand challenges for sustainable education and cultural literacy in the global context; identify the potential of ICT to advance and improve education; share knowledge and best practices about successful policies in global education; create venues of collaboration; and consolidate responsible communities for multi-literacies. (Varis & Alagdash, 2008).

In the UNESCO Report on Knowledge Societies (2005), there is a general agreement on the appropriateness of the expression «knowledge societies»; the same cannot be said of the content. Special efforts have been made to develop the new renaissance education and build global cultural bridges together with artists. It is widely understood that the most important skills of the future will be communication skills. Critical

thinking skills are needed as a productive and positive activity. Critical thinkers see the future as open and malleable, not as closed and fixed.

In his epilogue on «Education for a multicultural world» to the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century published by UNESCO in 1996 Rodolfo Stavenhagen pointed out that most modern nation-states are organized on the assumption that they are, or should be, culturally homogeneous. That is the essence of modern *nationhood*, upon which contemporary statehood and citizenship are founded. But a truly multicultural education will be one that can address simultaneously the requirements of global and national integration, and the specific needs of particular culturally distinct communities, both in rural and urban setting (Stavenhagen, 1996, p.230-231).

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