

TARPKULTŪRINIS UGDYMAS IR KOMUNIKACIJA

Media Literacy as a Tool in the Agency Empowerment Process

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The contemporary education paradigm determines the transition from the investment aspects (duration, place, teaching methodology) towards the learning outcomes closely linked to active, experiential learning, which substantiates the necessity for new types of partnership – for instance, the involvement of social partners, as well as the promotion of new types of cooperation between schools and families. A person who is able and willing to be involved in the social processes, who is capable to put forward his/her own goals and achieve these goals in a flexible manner, while adjusting to the situation and using the available resources, is the outcome of learning and may be defined as the agent.

The science of pedagogy has got involved in the research on social agency in order to construct its scientific interpretation of the necessity to change the way of pedagogical thinking – namely, to direct the pedagogical discourse of moral obligation towards the cooperative model, putting emphasis on the learner as a person whose personal viewpoint is to be respected, and not as an individual who does not comprehend what he/she is doing. It is the mutual respect, rather than obedience, which is the goal of education and upbringing in the post-modern environment. Rapid technological developments have impacted the interpretation of the concept of education and the roles of the educator and the learner, putting forward each agent's responsibility for life-long learning as a self-guided process and respecting the competences of each agent involved in education, all the while promoting their cooperation. This paper explores media literacy as the key component of agency and describes the mechanism of agency empowerment through the media education process, in an effort to find answers to the following questions: What is the key aim of media education? What is the content of media education? How media education ought to be integrated in the didactics of pedagogy and the teaching/learning process?

Keywords: agency, agent, media literacy, empowering agency.

The Concept of Agency

The desired outcome of contemporary education is a decent individual who is capable of changing the world and who can not only learn, but act as well. Learning is not the aim of education – it is a way

to become better, more capable. (Prencky, 2014) The aim of education is an individual who is able and wants to act as a capacitated person (agent). Agency is one of the most important quality of life indicators in the 21st century, one that has been

mentioned both in the leading policy and education resolutions, one that enters the routine of societal everyday life more frequently and which the media dubs as “the mastery of life”. (Rubene, 2015) The research interest about an agent in social sciences has been flourishing since the 1980s, bringing substantial changes in the subject’s perception in childhood research as well. (Raithelhuber, 2008)

In social sciences, this concept is explained in the context of the subject’s action, emphasizing the subject’s readiness to act and to choose independently. These two aspects are considered to be the most significant indicators of social agency. The subject acts independently in the framework of agency, thus strengthening his/her active position in relation to his/her own life and the society. (Erb, Kaindl, 2007; Hurrelmann, 1986)

Agency, in a more detailed discourse of social sciences, denotes the person’s ability to guide his/her life in a personally desirable direction, the readiness to take risks, responsibility and challenges, the ability to make a choice, i.e., to guide one’s social action in practice so as to reach a set aim. Agency cannot be separated from the action environment in which its conditions are formed and in which it is implemented. (Zobena, 2011) Agency is socially beneficial for the subject, because, with its help, the subject facilitates the transformation and advancement of the society. (Alkire, 2007) Therefore, in research, the subject should be analyzed in the context of the social environment within which the subject confirms the expression of his/her inner potential in action (Alsop, 2006) and

implements his/her political and social rights (Apine, Roga, 2011, Zobena, 2005) through social interactions and social practices (Raithelhuber, 2008). The continuity of the subject’s actions – participating in the processes that are significant for the whole world instead of taking part in separate acts of action (Giddens, 1998) – is being emphasized in the context of agency, thus looking at agency as a process and not only as an aim. (Sen, 2002)

By analyzing the topical components of agency in social sciences, it is seen that the most frequently mentioned descriptors of agency are initiative, activity, risk taking, adjustment, innovation, the ability to change, the management of one’s action and free action. In life, the agents need to use all of the mentioned descriptors in practice, to take for consideration that life nowadays consists of a real (physical) as well as a virtual space as a big part of it. Therefore, an educational process must focus on providing agents with tools that can be utilized within media space to raise the effectiveness of agency.

In examining the concept of agency, one should take into consideration the leading and opposite groups of theories in social sciences that analyze the issue on the formation of relations between social structures, processes and the ability of active subjects to act creatively and in a self-determined way. (Scherr, 2012, p. 99) Theories that analyse the relations existing between the structure and subject treat them either as opposites (the above described structure theories, also called macro social constructivism theories (Burr, 2003)), or as the co-existence of the subject and struc-

ture, the synthesis preserving the subject's agency. Agency in synthesis theories does not signify the individuals' free will, creativity or originality, but rather the socially determined ability of the individual to influence social processes. (Barker, 2004) Synthesis theories examine the subject's self-construction model, emphasizing the subject's freedom of choice, his/her own action, and his/her ability to influence and determine own actions. Namely, the subject is understood as a free entity who is able to decide and is active both in social processes and the self-development process, as the creative interpreter and constructor of one's social life. (Hurrelmann, 1986; Barker, 2004)

The subject builds interactive relations with the world and is not only a passive product of one's individual and social life conditions. (Keupp 2001, 39) Interaction is the binding element between the subject and structure because structures do not exist without the interaction of subjects and the subject construes oneself in the social reality by acquiring, activating, questioning and changing the norms and/or values that exist within the society; the subject shape's the view about oneself on the basis of the knowledge and experience gained during the interaction. (Berger, Lukman, 1991) The subject is an active participant of interaction in the process of reality and self-construction. (Verkuyten, 2005) The interaction process includes an educational process with a goal in agency empowerment, set to define knowledges, skills and attitudes that are required for quality participation in society processes and that give the possibility to empower them.

The active, socially constructed understanding of the subject in the modern education paradigm transforms the traditional teaching/learning process: there is a transition from the teacher-centered education to the learner-centered education; a set of new skills – namely, skills of the 21st century – become important; the teaching/learning process becomes interdisciplinary and integrated, based on projects, research activities and real life; technologies and media are used in the educational process (Anne Shaw, 2014). Such an educational process ensures the possibility for the learner to himself/herself participate in the setting of education goals, defining the tasks and even in choosing the learning content and methods as well as in self-controlling, monitoring and assessment. Teachers no longer “deliver” knowledge for the purpose of memorization, but support learners in the process of shaping their competences; they become partners. (Eurydice, 2002, Prencky, 2014)

For the subject to become active, it is necessary to develop his/her motivation, abilities, knowledge and skills (competences) – only after a successful completion of this process, the course of agency can begin (Rappaport, 1981, 1984), which is already connected with the subject's ability to manage and guide the processes that take place within society and to participate in societal life (Broka, 2013, Barker, 2003). This idea is intrinsic in the context of pedagogy, showing the possibility and importance of empowering purposeful agency, recognizing that agency combines knowledge with practice, resources with action (Bela, Tisenkopfs, 2006). Thus, it

becomes a pedagogical category, because only by acquiring knowledge and learning to manage resources the agency is being improved or empowered. The notion of empowerment is viewed together with the notion of agency. Empowerment is treated as the precondition of agency or its part (Alkire, 2005).

Media literacy as a component in the agency empowerment process

The key components of the empowerment process are access to information, inclusion and participation, responsibility and organizational capacity. (Narayan, 2005) The empowerment of agency is both a process and an aim, as a result of which the subject's possibilities in purposefully choosing and in turning this choice into anticipated actions increase, thus attaining the aim. In order to increase the subject's agency, particular instruments are used in the pedagogical process to acquire the skills necessary for the subject's development, social functioning and learning to effectively use the available resources. The present article will explore one of the components of the empowerment process – the access to information and media literacy as a tool in building this component. The most crucial thing to remember is that technical access to information does not make the subject literate in terms of media; one must be able to work with acquired information: to analyze, structure, select it in accordance with one's aims and use it. Thus, we have to speak about the purposeful development of media literacy in a pedagogically guided process (Considine, 1997).

Giving prominence to the access to information from all the complex agency empowerment activities, the following chain emerges, which clearly marks the fields of pedagogical action (see Figure No. 1):

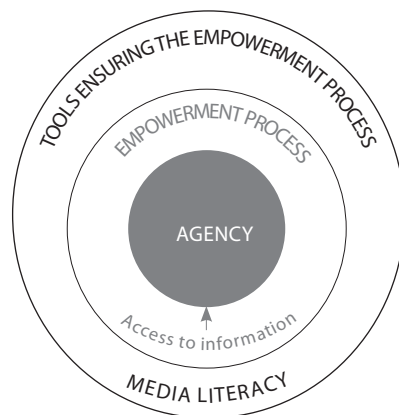


Figure No. 1. *Media literacy as the agency empowerment component (L. Valdmane, 2016)*

Media literacy develops in the process of media education and its importance has been described in the leading education policy documents since the 1980s.

In 1982, the *Grünwald Declaration on Media Education* was adopted; in 1989, the Council of Europe adopted the *Resolution on Education, Media and New Technologies*. It points out that the task of media education is to prepare people for a life in a democratic society, helping them understand the structure, mechanism and content of media, promoting independent and critical attitude towards the content of media; in 2006, the Council of Europe adopted the *Recommendations of Ministers' Commission to the Participating Countries to Ensure Children Possibilities in the New Information and Communica-*

tion Environment; in 2007, the Council of Europe defined 8 key competences, one of which was the digital competence – one that is a prerequisite for a successful life in the knowledge society. (Pamatprasmes mūžizglītībai Eiropas pamatprincipu kopums, 2007); the *Latvian National Development Plan 2014-2020* (NAP2020) defines the pillars of the education system that will shape the development of the future citizen and will promote his/her competitiveness in the labor market: an intensive acquisition of the Latvian language as well as foreign languages and information technologies. It is stated in Article 275 of the action *Competence Development* that in order for the person to be able to find and acquire a respectable job and be capable to care for oneself and one's own relatives, ultimately, then, to participate in the development of one's own country, one needs different competences; some of the mentioned are information and technology skills, communication and cooperation abilities, creativity, the capacity to think critically, assess risks and find solutions for issues related. By analysing the abovementioned documents, a conjunctive factor becomes evident – these acts emphasize the crucial role of media literacy in today's world, stressing media literacy both as an aim and as the element of the teaching/learning process. However, there still is lack of detailed and common understanding about the aim and content of media literacy as well as the empowerment process.

In order to develop and improve media literacy in the pedagogical process, one must answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the key aim of media education?
- 2) What is the content of media education?
- 3) How media education is to be integrated in the didactics of pedagogy and the teaching/learning process (Ugur, 2010)?

The author will seek to answer these questions in the current article, because these answers will demonstrate how the education process must be organized to empower agency.

The key aim of media education

Different terms, often used in parallel, are found in research literature– media literacy, media competence, digital competence. The term “media literacy” is more widely used in Latvia, understood as “a set of life skills that is necessary for full-fledged participation in the media saturated, information abundant society” (Hobbs, 2010). The following descriptors are named most media literacy definitions: the ability to understand the role and functions of media, to comprehend the conditions in which media can fulfill their functions; to code and decode the symbols transmitted by media; to synthesize, analyse and create media messages for self-expression and democratic participation (NAMLE, Fedorov, Ugur, 2010).

The aim of media education is to strengthen all competences (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that include media literacy of the education subject and that are necessary to work with the traditional media and new technologies. In order to attain the aim of media education, it

is important to understand the elements forming the media literacy, which shape the content of media education and which result from the above given media literacy definitions.

The content of media education

The greatest problem in defining the content of media education emerges from the fragmentation and presence of different fields – journalism, cinematography, politics, pedagogy, sociology, art, music, etc. Media education comprises all these autonomous fields (Ugur, 2010). Content produced in these fields, presented by audio, video, print or any other manner are represented in our daily lives and must be critically analyzed to acquire qualitative and trustable information, which we may later use in shaping our knowledge and attitudes.

The elements of media literacy, which form content of media education, are the following:

- 1) Media roles, functions, impacts, the understanding of actions and the practical application of media used in society;
- 2) The critical perception of messages of diverse forms (the identification of the author, aim, expressed opinion, the evaluation of content quality and credibility), the analysis, the selection of personally most suitable media;
- 3) Responsible participation in the media space, ensuring self-expression and participation, the reflection of one's attitude and communicative behavior on the basis of social responsibility and ethical principles;

- 4) Skills that are necessary to create one's own media content, using the language, pictures and sound to express it; applying new technologies, sharing one's knowledge and problem solutions both in the family and society; becoming an active member of society (Ugur, 2010; Hobbs, 2014).

As it was stressed above, the mentioned media literacy elements are diverse, multi-layered and include different thematic blocks. They also require active participation and action of the subject in the media space, who sets and achieves his/her aims using media as a tool.

At present, a study *Media Literacy in Latvia and Priorities* is being performed in Latvia to find out the teachers' opinion about the most important elements of the media literacy as well as to evaluate the media literacy of students and teachers. Parts of the study data will be used to evaluate the *Latvian Media Policy Guidelines for 2016-2020: Implementation Plan*, where media literacy is listed as one of the five sub-goals and action lines.

Teachers mention critical thinking, the ability to understand the impact of media on society, the assessment of media messages in accordance with one's experience, skills, values, conviction, understanding of authorship rights and the skill to use digital technologies as the most important knowledge and skills of media literacy that need to be acquired at school. Teachers were asked to assess students' knowledge and skills that are related to information and media literacy on 5 levels.

To comment on the data and to stress that media literacy in Latvia has not so far

Table No. 1. Teachers' assessment of students' media literacy (A. Rožukalne, 2016)

Knowledge/skills	Very good	Corresponds to age, stage of education	Does not correspond to age, stage of education	Very bad	N/A
Critical thinking skills	2%	52%	34%	5%	7%
The skill to recognize how media messages influence culture and society	2%	43%	30%	15%	10%
The skill to identify marketing strategies	0%	6%	41%	41%	6%
The skill to identify the impact mechanisms of commercials	5%	35%	24%	10%	26%
The skill to recognize what media developers want from us: whom to believe or what to do	0%	33%	32%	18%	17%
Understanding the quality of media content and its criteria	7%	27%	36%	24%	6%
The skill to recognize persuasion technologies	5%	25%	26%	27%	17%
The skill to recognize prejudices, rumours, manipulation and lies	3%	41%	31%	13%	12%
The skill to recognize disinformation	0%	30%	27%	29%	14%
Understanding the role of press freedom in the development of democracy	5%	34%	31%	10%	20%
The skill to ensure the safety of one's data and their use on-line	4%	40%	24%	18%	14%
Comprehension of authorship rights	3%	36%	29%	23%	9%
Comprehension of the journalists' principles of work and norms of ethics	0%	36%	22%	22%	20%
The skill to use digital technologies (gadgets and search programs) for learning and in leisure time	25%	34%	36%	0%	5%

been identified as an important element of formal education, it may be concluded that, in part, pupils construct the listed media literacy elements outside of the formal education process. The goal of media education in formal education is to raise media literacy from low percentages (less than 50%, see Table No. 1) to high percentages, as it can be observed currently (evaluation from A. Fjodorov), providing for the development of student agency. It

is the goal of education in the 21st century to narrow the gap between real life affairs, required skills and school – knowledge, skills and attitudes in formal education. Media literacy is considered as one of the competencies where school and real life can meet and empower student agency in real life, considering the learning process as empowerment.

The obtained data cannot be directly validated but they outline some criteria

that is comparable with the research performed in 2011 by State Latvian language agency *Media competence in students' and teachers' target group*. Several questions were posed in the study (not to such detail as in the study performed this year) that concern the critical evaluation of media messages. A positive indicator – 67% of students mention that it is important to compare different media as sources of information about a single topic. However, in 2011, the percentage of students critically assessing media information was only 33%, while 70% of students admitted that they did not pay attention to the author of the article, thus they did not assess the credibility of the source, which, in the modern space of abundant information, is a dangerous indicator that leaves room for propaganda, manipulations and the inability to differentiate credible information from lies.

A wide group of teachers and education policy makers were acquainted with these data obtained in 2011, encouraging them to assess the role of media literacy in the modern education process and the achievement of education aims. Since 2011, positive changes have taken place in the education space of Latvia, including the organization of teachers' professional development courses as a positive trend; however, no media education content has been developed in formal education. Some elements of media literacy are included in the school subject of informatics, some in pilot programmes in computing, but most of the above analyzed skills, knowledge and attitudes have been left as the choice for subject teachers, a fact also reflected in

data gathered by the study *Media Literacy in Latvia and Priorities*, indicating the low ability of students to identify the marketing strategies, perceive the aim of the author who had produced the media message, evaluate the equality, recognize the persuasion technologies and disinformation, etc. The teachers' answers in the 2011 study also confirmed that media literacy was important, but that they had no time to develop it in a particular school subject. It is very important to recognize that we must consider the level of medial literacy of teachers as well.

The study *Media Literacy in Latvia and Priorities* showed that teachers orient themselves well in the issues related to media practice and media impact but they do not feel certain about their skill to recognize disinformation; also, they evaluate themselves as poor creators of media content and subpar users of media technologies. These findings correlate with the study performed by the State Latvian Language Agency, which found that 89% of teachers use internet to get information necessary for work at school. As compared to students, teachers used the internet as the means of interaction and communication considerably scarcely in 2011. The analysis of teachers' self-assessment regarding the skills of media use show that the majority of teachers are prone to critical evaluation of media information – 83% consider that it is important to compare messages of different media about one topic, 70% of teachers disagree that the information provided by media is always true, and 54% of respondents pay attention to the author of a media message. Teach-

ers' critical thinking skills are developed through social experience and need to be improved because the obtained data do not indicate a high media literacy level among the teachers. It is very important to give teachers methodological support on how to strengthen students' media literacy using the media environment in which students spend the greatest part of the day. After the development of the media education program, it is necessary to work out a methodology on how to strengthen media literacy in school.

The analysed information and research data prove that it is equally important to develop media literacy in both students and teachers as well as in every member of the society to ensure agency and allow them to set and attain the aims of their lives. In the space of modern education, every one of us is the one who learns and the one who teaches (Prencky, 2010).

Media education in didactics of pedagogy and the teaching/learning process

The diverse fields comprised by media literacy define the broadness of the thematic blocks, which allow the acquiring media literacy to be considered as a separate school subject or as a transversal competence. At present, the introduction of competence-based teaching/learning content has been launched in Latvia, defining media literacy as a transversal competence (Guntars Catlaks, 2015).

The interdisciplinary nature of media education in each school subject allows for including tasks that strengthen the skills required to treat information in an

efficient manner, provide knowledge and shape attitudes. It is implemented in practical action because media literacy, as any other type of literacy (reading, writing, mathematics) signifies the ability to perform, not to know theoretically, and thus it develops only in action. In implementing competence-based education, the most essential condition is that media literacy is not introduced in education in a fragmentary way, but as an effective transversal competence; also, the development of the content of media education plays a significant role, too. The education system of Estonia and the role of media literacy in it can be mentioned as an example, even to learn not only from the best practice. The media education content and program which includes elements of media literacy – the access to information, perception and analysis, evaluation, creation, dissemination and the recommended school subjects in which they are to be included has been developed there in 2002.

Media literacy in the Estonian National Curriculum, starting from 2002, was a cross-curricular theme (the same position which is planned for it in Latvia when starting competence-based education). These are some important points to stress (Ugur, 2010):

- 1) Media education needs elastic means;
- 2) Subjects are overloaded and there is practically no room for cross-curricular themes;
- 4) Cross-curricular objectives need special events or blocks of activity (modules) (Reid, Scott, 2005).

These conclusions, gathered from more than 20 (the first media education curriculum was implemented in 1996) years of

work, must be taken into account when launching the reform of the Latvian education system and defining media literacy as cross-curricular competence.

Equally important is the fact that cross-curricularity depends on the individual competences and beliefs of the subject teacher. It is a very important factor, one which must be heeded for the introduction of media literacy to be successful; moreover, in any school, the feasibility of the subject ultimately depends on the media literacy of the teachers themselves, because only a teacher who himself/herself is media literate can purposefully develop the same subject in pupils (Ugur, 2010).

Only all the mentioned dimensions together, organized in the right order and providing media literacy with the importance of the key element in the agency empowerment process – the state educational policy, the content of competence, an educator's education – through media literacy can meaningfully strengthen agency in society and support each agent in his own development process.

Conclusions

1. The education system in Latvia is in a process of transformation, initiating the principles competence-based education. Therefore, it is very important to clearly understand the role of media literacy in the Information Society and its part in empowering the agency of each member of the society;
2. In the implementation of competence-based education, the most essential condition is that media literacy is not

introduced in education in a fragmentary way, but included as an effective transversal competence, together with the development of the content of media education;

3. In recognizing the elements of media literacy, most important course of action is to create (chiefly by analyzing the best practices in other countries) learning content and methods covering all named topics;
4. Critical thinking, the ability to understand the impact of media on society, assess the media messages in accordance with one's experience, skills, values, conviction, the understanding of authorship rights and the capability to use digital technologies are the most important aspects of media literacy that need to be acquired at school. Data shows that a very serious learning process is required to work on these media literacy components; otherwise, students will not be able to properly work with media messages and information – their agency might come under risk in the Information Society;
5. The media literacy of the teachers themselves is a very important factor for the introduction of media literacy to be successful in any school subject, because only a teacher who himself/herself is media literate can develop the same subject in pupils and yield purposeful results. An educator must change attitudes, forms of cooperation, training methods and one must do it well – he/she must also receive quality support in the education transformation process.

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MEDIJŪ IR INFORMACINIS RAŠTINGUMAS KAIP ASMENS ĪGALINĪMO PRIEMONĒ

Liene Valdmane

S a n t r a u k a

Šiuolaikīnē švietimo paradigmas diktuoja perējimą prie tokio mokymo (-si), kuris neatsiejamas nuo bendradarbiavimo tarp šeimos ir mokyklos, patirtinio mokymos (-si) bei aktyvaus socialinių partnerių įsitraukimo. Tokio mokymo (-si) rezultatas yra asmuo (*agent*), gebantis ir norintis įsitraukti į socialinį procesą, mokantis rasti galimybę ne tik kelti, bet ir

įgyvendinti savo tikslus, juos lanksčiai derindamas prie situacijos ar turimū išteklių. Toks asmuo gali būti apibrėžtas kaip įgalintasis asmuo.

Akivaizdi šiandienos edukacinė tendencija – asmenų, dalyvaujančių švietimo sistemoje, stiprinimas pasitelkus socialinį įgalinimą. Šiuolaikiniuose socialiniuose moksluose socialinio įgalinimo koncepc-

cija yra reikšminga. Manoma, kad tai yra vienas iš svarbiausių gyvenimo kokybės rodiklių. Įgalinimas yra procesas, kuris dėl savo tarpdiscipliniškumo bei daugiamatiškumo yra apibrėžiamas įvairiai ir nėra sutarta dėl vienos definicijos (Page, Czuba, 1999). Esamų apibrėžimų analizė atskleidžia, kad socialiniame diskurse įgalinimas pirmiausiai interpretuojamas veiklos kontekste. Asmens gebėjimas veikti nepriklausomai ir priimti sprendimus yra pagrindinis socialinio įgalinimo rodiklis. Asmuo veikia nepriklausomai, taip sustiprindamas įtaką tiek savo, tiek visuomenės gyvenime. (Erb, Kaindl, 2007; Hurrelmann, 1986).

Pedagogikos mokslas išitraukė į socialinio įgalinimo tyrimus. Konstruojamos mokslinės interpretacijos siūlančios keisti esamą pedagoginę mintį. Judama nuo tradicinio pedagoginio diskurso link bendradarbiaujančio modelio, akcentuojančio besimokantį kaip individą su unikalia pasaulėžiūra.

Įteikta 2016 10 03

Priimta 2016 12 05

Postmodernus laikmetis švietimui ir ugdymui keičia abipusės pagarbos, o ne paklusnumo diegimo tikslą. Sparti technologijų pažanga keičia švietimo koncepcijos interpretaciją ir švietėjo bei besimokančiojo vaidmenis. Svarbi tampa kiekvieno asmens savarankiško mokymosi visą gyvenimą atsakomybė bei pagarba visų švietimo dalyvių kompetencijoms. Straipsnyje tiriama medijų ir informacinio raštingumo svarba įgalinimo procese. Apibūdinami medijų ir informacinio raštingumo komponentai bei veikimo mechanizmai. Ieškomi atsakymų į klausimus:

- Koks yra pagrindinis medijų ir informacinio raštingumo ugdant tikslas?
- Koks yra medijų ir informacinio raštingumo turinys?
- Kaip integruoti medijų ir informacinį raštingumą į mokymo(si) procesą?

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: įgalinimas, įgalinti, medijos, medijų ir informacinis raštingumas