



CONCEPTS OF MEDIA LITERACY IN INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

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Abstract: Understanding, applying, and re-contextualising media literacy concepts are viewed as part of the tools beneficial for intergenerational learning. The individual autonomy of media content users is now, more than ever, under the pressure of accelerated media content production and consumption on the one hand, and on the other, amidst completely new consumerist needs. Approaches and perspectives in the field of media literacy are continuously developing to respond to the challenges brought by the digital age and changes in the media landscape. Based on the Central Concepts of Media Literacy, discussed by Potter and Hobbs, we believe that the continuous implementation of intergenerational learning about media literacy is necessary in Serbia, with a focus on digital literacy and technological competencies. Intergenerational learning is viewed as a learning partnership based on reciprocity and mutuality involving different ages, with generations working together to acquire skills, values, and knowledge. We approach education for media literacy holistically, viewing media literacy as a kind of intellectual curiosity activation, and we advocate for media literacy as activism in intergenerational, non-familial educational programs.

Keywords: media literacy, concepts of media literacy, intergenerational learning, activism

Conceptualization of Education for Media Literacy

The concept of media literacy, which relates to the set of knowledge, skills, and habits needed for full participation in a contemporary society saturated with media, transforms and changes as a result of rapid changes in digital media, mass media, social media, popular culture, and society. Media literacy has entered the educational and cultural system in four different ways: as an extended form of literacy; as an intervention designed to address potential harm from media exposure; as an approach designed to integrate digital technology into education; and as a dimension of global citizenship (Hobbs, 2019). Academic research approaches media literacy from various angles, following user needs and habits, the technological dictates of contemporary digital and post-digital society, and a range of scientific disciplines: media studies, communication studies and challenges, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, etc., referring to the contemporary economic, cultural, and social context, media, and users in these contexts (Zec, 2021).

The 1970s brought the first indications of the importance of education about media and media content, primarily for children and then for a broader audience. At that time, UNESCO promoted the idea of the importance of media education, and its first strategic forms were obtained with the Declaration on Media Education from Grunwald (1982). At the beginning of this century, UNESCO formulated a new overarching concept, MIL (media and information literacy). By integrating traditional and contemporary media, emphasising digital practices, and synthesising a broad approach to media education, it forms the basis for contemporary discussions on media literacy. "On the one hand, media literacy emphasises the ability to understand media functions, the ability to assess how these functions are fulfilled, and how to build a reasonable relationship with the media with the aim of self-expression. Information literacy, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of accessing information, evaluating it, and using it ethically." (Vajzović, 2021).

Basic Definition of Media Literacy: "The ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and communicate messages through media" (National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, Aspen 1992; Aufderheide, 1993) has evolved under the pressure of technological developments in media, i.e., accelerated production and consumption of media content on the one hand, and on the other, in the context of completely new consumer needs and ever-changing expectations of a fragmented audience. In his study on Media Literacy, Potter states that media literacy is a sure way for users overwhelmed by

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media content to free themselves from media programming of consciousness, i.e., to become aware of the harmful patterns and stereotypes that media incessantly and indiscriminately propagate. He defines media literacy as a set of perspectives that we actively apply when using media to interpret the meaning of the messages we receive, noting that it is a multifaceted concept that cannot be studied from a single angle and that media literacy is an ongoing process, not a one-time category. When we approach media literacy in this way, Potter points out, we enter the world of information, understanding not only their cognitive aspect but also their emotional, aesthetic, and moral aspects, teaching us to programme our own mental codes, thus enabling us to control media messages. The five key principles of media literacy conceptualised and discussed by Potter in the mentioned study are the foundation for every step in the conceptualization of this field (Potter, 2012, 2019):

1. All media messages are constructed - Every media message is the result of numerous decisions and processes, from the choice of words and images to the use of sound and graphics. Understanding how media content is constructed helps users recognise how these messages are shaped and why. They understand that different media can report the same event differently, depending on their editorial policies and intentions.

2. Media use creative languages with their own rules and codes - Media employ specific codes and conventions (visual, verbal, auditory, or hybrid) to convey messages. Knowing these codes and conventions enables users to better interpret and critically evaluate media content. Users understand that advertising often uses attractive images and sounds to capture attention and create positive associations with the product.

3. Different people experience the same media messages differently - People interpret media messages in various ways depending on their individual attitudes, backgrounds, experiences, cultures, beliefs, and values. Recognising this diversity helps users be aware of their own and others' biases, understanding that the same documentary film can be perceived as inspiring by one group of people, while another group may find it biased or offensive.

4. Media have embedded values and points of view - Media content reflects and promotes certain values, attitudes, and ideologies. Critical analysis of these values and attitudes helps users recognise and understand manipulations and biases in the media. They will accept that movies and TV shows are full of stereotypes that can influence the social perceptions of certain groups of people.

5. Media are commercial entities that shape content for profit - Media operate primarily as businesses aiming to make a profit. Understanding the commercial interests behind media content gives users the opportunity to become aware of possible manipulations and hidden meanings. Users realise that media often tailor their content to advertisers, strive to sell to as large an audience as possible, and this affects the objectivity of reporting.

In the study "Media Literacy in Action," Hobbs recalls the concept she elaborated a few years earlier, according to which, in the learning process, media literacy encompasses (Hobbs, 2021):

- Access – Locating and selecting appropriate and relevant content, ideas, and information, and accurately understanding messages;

- Analyzing – Using critical thinking to analyze the purpose, target audience, quality, truthfulness, credibility, point of view, and potential effects or consequences of the message;

- Creating – Composing or generating media content using creativity and confidence in self-expression, with an understanding of the purpose, audience, genre, form, and techniques of the creation process itself;

- Reflecting – Considering the impact of media and technology on our thinking and behavior in everyday life and applying social responsibility and ethical principles to our identity, communication behavior, and behavior in general;

- Taking action – Working individually and together to spread knowledge and solve problems in the family, workplace, and community, and participating as a community member at local, regional, national, and international levels (Hobbs, 2021).

The cited authors view media literacy as a kind of activation of intellectual curiosity through constant questioning and continually posing questions to the media and the world around them. Since individual autonomy of users is a key part of media literacy, both academics and activists who see media literacy as a social movement are motivated by the belief that changes in audience behaviour can lead to greater changes in the media industry and society in general (Hobbs, 2021).



Holistic Approach to Media Literacy Education

Compared to the basic approach, functional media literacy insists on a holistic approach, emphasising user competencies more strongly and expanding the focus to all generations, with an increasingly strong focus on critical skills that arise from the very concepts of media literacy: “mastering critical and creative skills, intellectual freedom based on doubt and (re)examination, seeking factual foundations for specific media claims” (EPALE, 2024). By introducing the term “critical media literacy” (Kellner, Share, 2007), the traditional concept of literacy has been further expanded, now “deepening the potential of education to critically analyse the relationships between media and audience, information and power; ... promoting skills in analysing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticise stereotypes, dominant values and ideologies, and competencies for interpreting multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts” (Kellner, Share, 2007). It empowers users to “intelligently use media” (Ranieri, Fabbro, 2016).

Along with all the benefits, the frequent use of this term in the context of education and media literacy also draws attention to an important aspect that deserves special discussion: “Researchers do not particularly focus on critical thinking, viewing this set of skills as an assumed aspect of media literacy, which has led to the generally accepted conclusion that one who is media literate simultaneously thinks critically about media” (Kecman, 2023). Critical media analysis encourages citizens to think critically about media content, recognising the implicit intentions and perspectives hidden behind published information. This type of analysis includes recognising the political, economic, or ideological interests that may influence the way information is presented. It is “an intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. It is based on universal intellectual values: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, solid evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.”

A holistic understanding of the complex interactions between media, society, and individuals implies the integration of various disciplines that encourage citizens to recognize implicit messages and subtexts in media that can shape public opinion and social dynamics. It focuses on the importance of understanding cultural contexts, norms, values, and stereotypes reflected through media content, implying a comprehensive approach to understanding, analysing, and practicing media skills and knowledge. This approach encompasses different dimensions of media literacy such as critical thinking, analytical skills, understanding media and media messages, and the ability to actively participate in the media environment (Buckingham, 2020; Christ, DeAbrou, 2020; DeAbreu, Lee, McDougall, Melki, Mihailidis, 2017; Hobbs, 2011). The key aspects of the holistic approach to media literacy include:

1. Critical Thinking about Media - Developing the ability to analyze media messages, recognize stereotypes, biases, and political manipulations in media;
2. Analytical Skills - The ability to interpret and evaluate media content, understand its context and implications;
3. Understanding Media Technologies - Knowledge of the technology behind the media and understanding how these technologies affect the way information is transmitted and consumed;
4. Ethics and Responsibility - Developing awareness of ethical issues in the media industry, including issues of privacy, freedom of expression, information manipulation, and the media’s responsibility to the public;
5. Active Citizenship - Encouraging active participation in the media environment, such as creating content, commenting, sharing information, and participating in public debates.

Media Literacy as Activism in Intergenerational Education Programmes

Intergenerational learning is a learning partnership based on reciprocity and mutuality involving different age groups, where generations work together to acquire skills, values, and knowledge (EPALE) . As approaches and perspectives in the field of media literacy continuously evolve to meet the challenges posed by the digital age and changes in the media landscape, we believe that continuous implementation of an intergenerational education programme focusing on all types of media, digital literacy, and technological competencies is necessary in Serbia.

Globally, intergenerational programmes are emerging as a form of service that provides systematic and purposeful interaction between people of different ages. Their existence is owed to a convergence of numerous social, economic, and political factors. With the increase in the number and diversity of intergenerational programmes, practitioners and administrators see themselves as members of a distinct, new, and growing profession: the intergenerational field of human services. The concept is embodied in



programmes that include planned, ongoing interactions between non-biologically related children, youth, and older adults. Such programmes engage these groups in activities that benefit both the young and the old (Newman, S. 1997).

Intergenerational media literacy programs have begun to develop more intensively in recent decades, paralleling the rapid development of digital technology and the growing need for digital literacy. During the 2000s, the value of connecting older and younger generations for joint learning about digital technologies was recognized. Programmes like “Cyber-Seniors” (Canada, 2009) began to gain popularity. “Grandparents and Grandkids Tech Workshops” have existed for about a decade in Australia. A successful programme implemented in Serbia was the “Digital Expedition,” a caravan of digital skills, digital literacy, and online safety. The caravan, during its course in 2021 and 2023, visited about twenty cities in Serbia, and last year it offered its services to older citizens gathered in local pensioners’ associations .

We view all these programmes as activism - planned behaviour with the idea of achieving certain social goals, where knowledge and experience are put at the service of immediate life needs .

Specifically, as with activism, media literacy focuses on developing and using tools for active participation in public life and democratic processes (Davis, J.F., 1993). This approach encourages citizens to use their media skills to engage in social change, advocate for civil and other rights, and participate in public debates. Additionally, it makes users aware that media use numerous strategies for manipulation, concealment, or promotion of various interests, such as:

- Selective reporting: Media selectively choose the stories or events they will report on. Their choices determine which information will be available to the public. This process can be driven by ideological biases or the interests of certain political or economic groups;
- Stereotypes and framing: Through the use of stereotypes and specific narrative frameworks (framing), media shape public perceptions of certain groups or topics. The use of certain words, images, or symbols evokes associations that support a particular ideological position or interest;
- Language manipulation: The language used in media messages is carefully chosen to promote a certain ideology or set of values, or to discredit opposing ideas. The use of emotionally charged words or phrases affects the perception and attitudes of the audience;
- Response to economic interests: Media ownership is often linked to the economic interests of certain groups or companies. Such interests influence the selection of topics, how they are reported, and how they are interpreted;
- Manipulation of visual and audio content: The use of photos, videos, graphics, or music creates an atmosphere or emotions related to certain events or topics, influencing the public’s perception of these issues;
- Censorship or self-censorship: Pressures from political, economic, or other interest groups lead to self-censorship or censorship of information or opinions in the media, limiting the pluralism of opinions and ideas.

Public policies and the strategy for developing media literacy were incorporated into Serbia’s document „Strategy for the Development of Public Information Systems in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025“. The document does not foresee the implementation of intergenerational learning, although it allows for at least basic discussion on the topic. Outside the clear focus of the Strategy are efforts to activate social participation across all generations in closing the digital divide, sharing ideas and perspectives, contributing to mutual respect for diversity, and establishing balanced and democratic communities, whether online or offline (Corrigan, McNamara, & O’Hara, 2013; Kaplan, Sanchez, Hoffman, 2017), as well as artificial intelligence and critical thinking about artificial intelligence (Aschemann, Schüßler, 2024).

Conclusion - The importance of intergenerational learning on media literacy in Serbia, with a focus on critical thinking

Three years ago, the European Commission presented its vision and pathways for successful digital transformation in Europe by 2030. The Digital Compass for the EU’s Digital Decade relies on four pillars: skills, secure and sustainable digital infrastructure, digital transformation of businesses, and digitization of public services. Possessing relevant skills, including digital literacy, helps individuals successfully and fully engage in society and democratic processes. Intergenerational learning on media literacy, focusing on digital literacy and the technological challenges of users, aligns with the challenge set by Europe, including the challenge related to an informed and inclusive society in today’s media environment. It also belongs to the new paradigm of intergenerational learning present in modern society, the so-called



'beyond-family' model of intergenerational learning (Milošević, Medić, Popović, 2013). The benefits of such programmes, directly derived from the concepts of media literacy as discussed by Potter and Hobbs, are numerous:

1. Enhancement of critical thinking: Intergenerational learning on media literacy enables older generations to develop critical thinking and analytical skills regarding media content, resist fake news and misinformation, and empower themselves to independently assess information credibility.

2. Increased resilience to manipulation: Through intergenerational learning, both younger and older generations acquire skills to recognise media manipulations and propaganda, making them less susceptible to media influences.

3. Actively seeking diverse perspectives: Understanding media literacy encourages participants to actively seek different perspectives on specific topics or events. This allows them to grasp the complexity of social issues and form informed opinions based on a wide range of information.

4. Critical analysis of arguments: Media literacy teaches both younger and older generations how to critically analyse arguments and viewpoints presented in the media. It enables them to identify logical fallacies, ascertain the lack of evidence or bias in reporting and commentary, aiding them in making informed conclusions.

5. Evaluation of accuracy and credibility of information: Media literacy teaches how to critically assess the accuracy and credibility of consumed information. It encourages users to verify information from multiple sources, employ various methods to fact-check, and be aware of possible biases or manipulations.

6. Understanding context and intentions: Media literacy helps all generations understand the context in which information is presented and recognise the intentions behind specific media content. This includes identifying commercial interests, political agendas, or ideological stances that may influence how information is portrayed.

7. Constructive participation in online and offline discussions: Developing media skills opens opportunities for active participation in social debates via social media, forums, or within local communities. It allows them to share knowledge and experience, express their views, and contribute to discussions in a way that promotes constructive dialogue and idea exchange.

8. Encouraging intergenerational dialogue: Media literacy intergenerational learning programmes foster dialogue between different generations, contributing to understanding diverse perspectives and experiences. This interaction builds bridges between generations and strengthens social cohesion.

9. Preparation for the digital age: Given the ubiquity of digital media, it's crucial for all generations in Serbia to be proficient in effectively using the internet and digital platforms. Intergenerational learning provides older individuals with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with modern technologies and express their views through digital channels.

10. Promotion of active citizenship: Through understanding media literacy, both younger and older generations in Serbia can actively participate in social debates, express their opinions, and influence public opinion constructively. This is essential for a democratic society based on informed citizens.

11. Educating other generations: Older generations educated in media literacy can pass on their knowledge to younger community members or grandchildren. This not only contributes to the education of others but also builds bridges between generations in the digital world, fostering intergenerational dialogue and perspective exchange.

Through these and numerous other activities, all generations become active participants in social debates, contribute to social capital, and help shape public opinion in an informed, diverse, and inclusive manner. "People's resilience to information and media distortions in areas such as politics, economy, lifestyles, human rights, democratic discourse, and social cohesion is being tested by history" (Vajzović, 2021). Media, information, digital, and news literacy—however we name the literacy standing opposite the media—are based on the principles of lifelong learning, to which we now add the principle of intergenerational support and learning.

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