

Chapter 4

A Discipline Approach: The Relationship Between Media Literacy And Social Studies

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ABSTRACT

Social studies is one of the most related fields of media literacy, such as health, language, information, and communication program. Contrary to popular belief, media literacy is not the use of media tools such as newspaper in the social studies courses. Students must have the ability to choose the right one among myriad of information, to understand visual images, to reach reality through eliminating stereotypes and prejudices, questioning the construction and context of a text. In this way, media literacy and social studies aim the formation of good, questioning, and active citizens. In this chapter, the relationship between media literacy education and social studies is examined based upon previous researches. The importance of media literacy for teaching social studies is discussed and concrete sample activities that can be used by teachers and students in social studies lessons are presented. In this way it is aimed to make a synthesis by associating social studies with media literacy skills that is access, analyze, evaluation, create, and act.

INTRODUCTION

The century in which we live has been an era of unprecedented technological change with the introduction of new or digital media. These changes affect our lives every day and bring us in contact with voluminous information. Geographic distances seem to close due to the availability of cheap and fast international networks. In this globalized world, active citizen participation in social and contemporary issues is increasing in importance. Therefore, media literacy has become an important life skill for the 21st century, inseparable from social studies. The purpose of social studies is to enable students to understand society and participate in actively and effectively in civic life. Furthermore, social studies knowledge makes it possible to understand the distinction between fiction and reality and is therefore one of the fields most related to media literacy.

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A Discipline Approach

Media literacy education strategies have improved dramatically in effectiveness in recent years. Media literacy has gained importance due to the recognition that individuals are continuously exposed to biased, manipulated, and fake news; persuasion through ads, propaganda; stereotypes; the increased use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, smartphones, and the addictive attraction of video games. Contrary to the popular belief, media literacy is not the use of media such as television, radio, and newspapers in social studies courses. Because traditional print media is no longer sufficient, students must have the ability to choose the right form of media to acquire information, to understand visual images, to reach reality through eliminating stereotypes and prejudices, to question the construction and context of a text, and analyze and evaluating messages. They therefore need to learn how to analyze and evaluate the material presented in digital forms as well. Students must know how to question messages critically. In this way, media literacy and social studies together can promote the development of active citizens.

Both subjects are intertwined with life. Social studies does not just focus on teaching history, geography or philosophy. Instead, it addresses such issues as human rights, democracy, environment, elections, propaganda, racism, social justice, nationalism, values, ethical attitudes, culture, freedom and access, and dissemination of information, all of which are directly related to media literacy. In the sections that follow, the importance of media literacy education for teaching social studies is discussed, and sample lesson plans that can be utilized in social studies lessons are presented. After introducing basic media literacy principles and skills, the relationship between media literacy and social studies and the common objectives of the two disciplines are discussed. Finally, suggested activities for use in teaching digital and media literacy will be presented. These activities cover all media literacy skills and five basic key questions created by NAMLE (National Association for Media Literacy Education). The chapter aims to make lessons more effective by eliciting critical perspectives related to media and media production through the use of group discussion and cooperative learning to fuel inquiry, evaluation, content analysis, and comparison. The chapter will address such questions as: Which strategies are appropriate? What is the best way to establish context? What implications are required for practice? Which techniques should be used for visual and text analysis?

WHAT IS SOCIAL STUDIES?

Over time, many definitions have been applied to the field of social studies. Finally, in 1994 the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), an organization of professional social studies educators, introduced a comprehensive definition. This definition, which is accepted as the main reference by social studies experts states:

“Social studies is the integrated study of social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provide coordinated systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, economics, history, geography, law, political science, religion and sociology as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of culturally diverse, democratic society in an independent world” (NCSS, 1994, p. 3).

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