

Chapter 3

Perspectives on Media Literacy, Digital Literacy and Information Literacy

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ABSTRACT

The cultural landscape poses different challenges for teachers. Beyond developing reading and writing skills, it is necessary to emerge in the digital culture and master the different codes of different languages. In this context, media education studies discuss the educational possibilities of interpreting, problematizing, and producing different kinds of texts in critical and creative ways, through the use of all means, languages and technologies available. Considering that media cannot be excluded from literacy programs, it is essential to reflect on the definition of “literate” today. These reflections examine the resignification of concepts like literacy, media literacy, digital literacy and information literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Concepts such as media literacy, digital literacy and information literacy are being used with greater frequency in the field of education and communication. But what is the specificity of each literacy and its concept? This article will discuss this issue based on the understanding of scholars from the field of media education.

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Many authors consider media-education to be a synonym for literacy or media literacy. Buckingham differentiates these concepts, arguing that literacy involves reading and writing, while media literacy necessarily involves interpretation and production of media.

Media education, then, is the process for teaching and learning about the media; media literacy is the outcome – the knowledge and the skills learners acquire. (...) Media literacy neces-

sarily involves 'reading' and 'writing' media. Media education therefore aims to develop both critical, understanding and active participation. It enables young people to interpret and make informed judgments as consumers of media; but it also enables them to become producers of media in their own right. Media education is about developing young people's critical and creative abilities (2005, p. 4).

Understanding that media literacy “refers to the knowledge, skills and competencies that are required to use and interpret media,” Buckingham (2005, p. 36) highlights that the different literacies demanded by the different media involve specific abilities of analysis, evaluation and reflection, and imply an understanding of the social economic and institutional context of the communication, to understand how it affects the experiences and uses of the media and their interpretations on micro and macro levels. Since different media have distinct narrative structures and elements, the production of meanings is based on the abilities to operate with the codes of different languages and their instruments, such as photographic cameras, video cameras, computers, cell phones, etc.

From this perspective, media literacy involves the capacity to decipher, appreciate, criticize and compose, but also requires a broad understanding of the historic, economic and social context in which these texts are produced, distributed and used by audiences, as Silverstone (2005) emphasizes. To assure this form of appropriation, the learning of the medias should be dynamic and involve reflexive approaches combined with critical analyses, creative productions and critical consumption.

Working for quite some time with the concept of media literacy, Hobbs (1994) defines it as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of forms” (Aufderheide apud Rivoltella, 2005, p. 69). This definition is also found in the works of Livingstone (2003) and Rivoltella (2005), who understand that it

involves an ability to read, write, speak, listen, and see critically and create messages using the broadest range of technologies.

Media literacy is “literacy for the information era,” according to Hobbs (1994, p.2) for whom it means essentially learning to formulate questions about what one sees, observes and reads. To do so, it is possible to use the most varied types of messages and products: television drama, newspapers, films, news programs, documentaries, mini-series, advertising, photography, video-clips, online services, etc.

The essential focus of this media literacy approach is anchored in the presumptions of Masterman, which Hobbs appropriates by synthesizing his fundamental ideas: all messages are constructed; messages are representations of reality; messages have proposals related to social, political and economic, ethical, and aesthetic contexts; individuals construct meanings for the messages that they receive; each media, form and genre of communication have specific characteristics.

The focuses of media literacy correspond to a demand for greater semantic amplitude of the concept of literacy, and for Hobbs (2003) concern the possibility of knowing how to:

- *access messages*: read with a good level of understanding; recognize and understand different types of languages; develop strategies to look for information in different sources; select relevant information, process and analyze it; use various technological tools;
- *analyze messages*: develop a reflexive and critical reception; analyze the form, structure and construction of meanings; know how to use categories, concepts and ideas; interpret messages based on basic concepts such as intentions, audiences, points of view, formats, genres, arguments, themes, languages, contexts; compare and contrast infor-

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