



Resource Review

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Review:

Issues in Information and Media Literacy is the first of two volumes described as 'charting the dynamic and exciting field of information and media literacy'. This volume is titled 'Criticism, History and Policy' and consists of 12 chapters organised into five sections.

Overall this volume provides a thoroughly engaging exploration of issues of media literacy and education. One of the strengths of the volume is how 'media literacy' and 'media education' are dealt with and the instructive accounts of these distinctions the reader may take. There is strong consistency in how these terms are deployed with, for example, Uusitalo (p.19) stating that media literacy refers 'to the knowledge and skills learners acquire through media education', and Lin (49) suggesting that, 'media education refers to the process of teaching media literacy as the desired goal'. As Leaning makes clear in his chapter, this approach of seeing literacy as skills acquired through education can be traced to David Buckingham (2003). Further to the instructive working through of these terms and concepts, another consistent strength is the range of international perspectives, with chapters focusing on Taiwan, Canada, Russia, Peru, Turkey, India and Malta. A final point worth flagging in relation to the whole volume is that a number of contributions address the emphasis on training and skills. This agenda can be identified across numerous government policy reports (see Ashton, forthcoming), and this volume presents a number of much needed critical perspectives.

There are also a few, small areas that could have been further worked on. Whilst it may seem overzealous to pick up on grammatical errors and the like, this volume did seem to contain a significant amount. These ranged from inconsistencies in date form (i.e. 80s or 80's), factual inaccuracies (i.e. Department of Media, Culture and *Society*), typographical errors, missing words, referencing omissions, duplicated index entries, and blank pages. The overall presentation also appears more like conference proceedings (though the contributions were elicited by a call for papers), and the general presentation seemed a bit tired. At times the writing style of some authors was inaccessible and organisational efficacy of some chapters could have been sharper. All this though should not detract from the insightful contributions (all clearly introduced in the preface) and that this volume would be a hugely important resource for those interested and researching in the field.

The first section on 'Theories and Criticism' consists of two chapters. The first by the editor Marcus Leaning, 'Theories and Models of Media Literacy', is very accessible and provides a broad account of 'media' and different media literacy models. Given the references to McLuhan, Williams and media theory, a more detailed explication of media literacy in relation to Media Studies as an undergraduate degree would have been helpful. The crucial contribution comes with Leaning's outline of three models (inoculation; demystification; and participatory) and when he points to notable changes in media consumption, pedagogic practice and media technology that have seen a shift from assisting 'users to defend themselves' (p.12) to 'facilitating engagement with critical and creative practice' (p.14). It may have been helpful for Leaning to unpack his comments on the participatory model in relation to some examples and case studies. This could have helped illustrate and ground issues of media literacy, participation and media technology, and to ensure 'digital native' assumptions did not come into play. That said, Leaning's concluding remarks directing the reader to consider 'transformations in ideological dominance' as much as pedagogical practice and changes in the political landscape, perform the hugely important role of situating media literacy debates and signalling the range of considerations. The second chapter by Niina Uusitalo, 'Media Education as a Technology of Citizenship, analyses 'the construction of media literacy as a civic competence' (p.20). Uusitalo adopts Barbara Cruickshank's 'technologies of citizenship' and her approach referring to the 'discourses, programs or other tactics aimed at making individuals politically active and capable of self-government' (p.21). This argument was clearly laid out and Uusitalo provides a stimulating prompt. As we see with a number of other contributors in this volume and commentaries elsewhere (Livingstone, 2008, p.5), media literacy and citizenship are becoming explicitly and intimately enmeshed within policy approaches (for example Ofcom in the UK). Closer case studies and application may have helped strengthen this perspective, but Uusitalo's deployment of the 'technologies of citizenship' approach nevertheless offers an analytical framework for attending to these policy approaches and 'the process of creating citizens'.

The second section, 'Politics and Policy', contains three chapters. Yasmin Ibrahim guides the reader through the analogue to digital switchover and the 'discourse of switchover' (interactivity, the 'vulnerable consumer', and citizenship). References to *Digital Britain* are made throughout, but as this has now been published (June 2009), the reader will be able to synthesis Ibrahim's comments with the final report. More specifically though, this chapter explores the politicisation of media literacy with Ibrahim noting a sociocultural framework that goes beyond 'literacy=skills', to highlight the 'ideological and policy paradigms that evolve, contextualise and frame literacy' (p.44). Tzu-Bin Lin in chapter four provides a case study of media education policy in Taiwan. A Critical Discourse Analysis is used to critique the representations and accounts of new media. Whilst Lin may be correct in highlighting the confusion of policy-makers around television and 'new media', the comment that a policy-maker

'ignores the reality that new media are taking the place of traditional media' (p.53) seems itself too blunt in its appreciation of media transformation. Greater unpacking of 'new media' may have helped underpin Lin's strong claim that 'the cultural dimension of new media is ignored by the policy makers' (p.67). Given that policymakers were interviewed, it would be interesting to see what forms of dialogue Lin could develop beyond analysing report rhetoric, and whether the 'confusions' of interviewees/policymakers could be explored directly. The final chapter in this section by Kristen Kozolanka tackles 'The Politics of Media Literacy in Ontario'. This chapter provides a timely critique of the instrumental skills focus of education. Kozolanka identifies the tensions between New Right politics and educational advocacy and suggests that Harris Conservative government discourse on education and technology was, 'deterministic as well as determinedly focused on narrow objectives that fed corporate needs for trained workers, rather than critical citizens' (p.75). Whilst a more nuanced exploration, for example on 'critical workers', could be drawn on, this chapter makes important statements tackling this increasingly pervasive approach. Kozolanka notes the naming of government departments (Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Education) as part of her account. Given the similar renaming of government departments in the UK (i.e., the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills), Kozolanka's concerns and analysis of the Ontario situation are hugely relevant. As an addition to this, the overview of the 1998 media education advocacy campaign could be a valuable resource.

The third section, 'Development and Practice', potentially offers the most practical and applicable advice. By offering case studies from Turkey (Bek and Binark), Malta (Borg and Lauri), and India (Desai and Seshu), the reader is presented with a rich range of experiences and practices. Bel and Binark (with reference to Henry Giroux) express a concern around 'skills' when they note the perspective that critical pedagogy should not be about 'job preparation' but about 'imagining different futures for citizens' (p.97). They suggest that 'official institutions' have a limited understanding that can reduce media literacy to a skills education. In turn, they turn to a critical pedagogy and critical media literacy (Kellner and Share, 2007). In adopting a critical pedagogy approach, a clearer articulation of media literacy and Media Studies may have been useful (for example, the account of critical media literacy as critical theory and critical practice on p.98 resonates with Media Studies as a discipline). In developing their approach, Bel and Binark make some big asks (i.e. that teachers should adopt a critical pedagogy perspective). That said, their case study of the Radio Television Authority in Turkey was engaging, with useful critiques of practice and instructive comments about political agendas for education. In introducing media education in Matla, Borg and Lauri provide a thorough account of wider contextual factors (religion) and provide insights into the debates, curriculum and implementation of the Maltese programme. As with Bin's chapter earlier, a greater degree of media specificity would be welcomed. In the final chapter by Desai and Seshu the similarity of issues (gender, children) across countries emerged clearly, and in this respect this chapter promises a useful resource for comparative analysis. Moreover, they provide an instructive overview of a range of initiatives in India.

The fourth section, 'Histories and Influences', contains three historical accounts: one on Peru (Mansilla) and two on Russia (Fedorov; Yoon). Mansilla's chapter holds out the fascinating promise of exploring media literacy for media professionals/industry. This is unfortunately not clearly explored in detail, but the chapter nonetheless offers an interesting perspective from Peru touching on political interventions, propaganda and censorship. One of the strengths of an edited volume is in the way different authors deal with the issue. So whilst Bel and Binark employ critical pedagogy and are less concerned with critical consciousness, Mansilla highlights 'critical reading' and the 'political awakening of the masses'. It is the range of nuances and contextual

factors that make a collection such as this so valuable. The very specific meanings that can be developed come across in the next chapter on media education in Russia when Fedorov refers to 'the process of the development of personality' (p.186). This seemed a curious phrasing, but the rest of this understanding was common to those perspectives expressed throughout the volume. In offering a detailed history, Fedorov creates a rich resource for identifying scholars in the field, different directions and models, and contextual considerations. Yoon's chapter, whilst also focusing on Russia, offers a unique contribution to this volume by going into depth regarding international agencies (UNESCO and UNICEF). Yoon's account of their involvement and the associated limitations is insightful for considering international understandings of this field and the potential for shared directions and partnerships.

The final section on 'New Directions' consists of an exploration of visual literacy. Focusing on a case study based in Dutch universities, the authors (Velders et al.) present their framework and offer reflections. Their broad framework for visual literacy (taking in 'culture', 'cognition' and 'technology') is outlined for the main part of the chapter, with a rather brief case study section towards the end. To have been of further value in terms of this volume and 'new directions', a much clearer account of visual literacy in relation to media literacy would be needed. Whilst this chapter was identified as 'new directions', a great many of these chapters, from history to contemporary practice, made stimulating contributions and suggestions that those involved in media education/literacy are sure to benefit from. On the basis of this volume, I look forward to exploring the second volume (Education, Practice and Pedagogy, available now – September 2009), and developing the connections and perspectives made in volume one.

References

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