Media and Information Literacy in a Spirit of Social Change that Goes Beyond Social Reform

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The fifth declared principles of the World Journalism Education Council emphasizes that Journalism educators have an important outreach mission to promote media literacy among the public generally and within their academic institutions specifically.

Aviva Silver, Head of Unit Media Programme and Media Literacy of the European Commission cited that all witnessed an unprecedented technological revolution that the meaning of wealth had shifted towards ownership of knowledge and information. And that technological change makes it possible for virtually all people to become not only consumers but also creators of media content. European citizens saw that media have become an increasingly powerful economic social force and are accessible instruments to better understand the societies in which they live and participate in the democratic life of their community. This view led them to set an ambitious objective for Europe. It was on March 2000, at the Lisbon European Council wherein Heads of State and government joined together in making Europe a more competitive knowledge economy and at the same time a more exclusive knowledge society. In so doing, a higher degree of media literacy would help their societies fulfill the so-called ambitious objective for Europe.

While the importance of media education is gradually recognized worldwide, globalization provides new opportunities for change and interconnections as the role of overarching governance bodies and Intergovernmental Organizations like UNESCO, European Commission, Council of Europe Alliance of Civilizations, ISESCO, The Arab League, Nordicom's International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media among other which support the urgent need for a worldwide coherent and sustainable development as cited by Dr. Divina Frau-Megis and Jodi Torrent. Furthermore, raising awareness about the role of media both old and new enabled a better understanding of Information and Communication processes, world events like the Groundbreaking Grunwald Declaration in 1982, Alexandrian Proclamation on Information and Literacy and Lifelong Learning in 2005, Paris Agenda for Media Education in 2007 encapsulated several principles and objectives that collective aim at similar goals. There were also several negotiated tools including UNESCO's Media Education Kit in 2007 UNESCO's current initiative on Training the Trainer on Media and Information Literacy curricula and the Alliance of Civilization's multi-faceted support of media literacy which all point to the feasibility and desirability of the process. Gaining much from the Media and Information Literacy world initiatives and tools provided, another International Framework for building Societies came in. This framework was elaborated during and after the World Summit on Information Society from 2003 -2005 and on the Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity

of Cultural Expressions in 2005. All these endeavors as further stated by Megis and Torrent have reached the policy-making epoch whereas definitions, curriculum development, and evaluation are no longer questions of interest for researchers and educators alone instead they are defining options for the future and required strategies that can be shared, tested and adopted in a spirit of social change and goes beyond social reform. They mentioned regional initiatives that existed already like the European Commission's communication that recommends all member states to provide national assessments on the level of media literacy of their citizens including the First Conference on Media Education of the Middle East in Saudi Arabia in 2007, the International Media Literacy Research Forum held in London and Hongkong in 2008. All these and a lot more point to help decision-makers, educators, media professionals, researchers, and activists to activate reforms responding to the social need for media education among nations of the world.

According to Alice Y. Lee an associate professor of the Department of Journalism at Hongkong Baptist University, three key future competencies are essential to future society. The first is on conceptual competencies which include connective thinking, innovative thinking, problem-solving, critical thinking, reflective thinking, and positive thinking skills. The second is on practical competencies comprising media and information literacy with ICT skills as a key component and learning skills while the third one is on human competencies including social networking skills and virtual collaboration, self-management, humanistic consciousness, digital citizenship, and cross-cultural interaction skills.

Abdul Waheed Khan UNESCO's assistant director general for communication and information said that what the media audiences need to be empowered to function as autonomous and rational citizens that will enable them to make informed use of the media is media education which provides the critical knowledge and analytical tools.

It is in this context that UNESCO has been working for over the past twenty years. The initiative towards media literacy is found in the framework of the Grunwald Declaration of 1982 which gave birth to the UNESCO Paris Agenda including twelve recommendations for media education. Its strategy in promoting consists of awareness raising on the importance of media education at all levels of the education process, from primary to secondary down to lifelong learning, and goes beyond teacher training as well as establishing guidelines, and promoting policies for curricula development.

In fact, in 2008 UNESCO launched the teacher education enrichment project in recognition of this need – to train teachers in developing countries to integrate media education into the teaching-learning process. This initiative includes the development of the first role model curriculum that merges media and information literacy which are both components of knowledge societies into one discipline and to facilitate the integration of media and information literacy in the teaching training curricula.

Nonetheless, despite these noteworthy developments, Khan notices many countries are still far behind seeing the positive trend toward a policy and regulatory framework to guide and support systematic take up of media education, that compulsory media education modules should be incorporated into teacher training modules for all levels.

In the case of Hong Kong, Cheung stated that a research report provided a triggering event at the origin of national reform on how media education has changed and progressed. Further, he said that for successful reform, media education is the key. He even cited three major ingredients: civic agency, information technologies, and curriculum review connections.

On the other hand, Jeong added an ingredient to what was done by Cheung, this is to connect

to existing communities of practice. In South Korea, they showed how teachers and educators seized on media even before their governments. Megis and Torrent mentioned in many countries, reforming schools to include media education is a way of legitimizing a decade long situation. They said that there is no need to reinvent the wheel since human and material resources exist.

If reform is to be done, there are nine key tenets for successful implementation and this includes - grassroots communities of practice, curriculum development, research support, in-service training, communication networks, relevant media materials, professional organization of media education teachers, evaluation, and collaboration with parents and media professionals as stated by Wilson and Duncan.

While all these things had taken off in other countries, in the Philippines Media and Information Literacy roots could be traced back as early as the 1960s with the integration of Good Manners and Right Conduct at the elementary level. (Alagaran, 2017) Since then, the coming of Western shows in Philippine broadcast programs noticed by teachers that mass media had immense impact on the values formation in children. (Rivera, 2011) Even though this early initiative of media education in the country might be lacking in the so-called critical discourse, this has set the precedence. The establishment of the following organizations, Communication Foundation for Asia (CFA), The National Office of Mass Media (NOMM) Episcopal Commission on Media (ECM), the Association for Media Education (PAME) People in Communication Inc (PIC), Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre now Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) proved that RP had a long story on this path. Moreover, the publications of MediaWatch, a magazine on media awareness, and Your Guide to Kiddie TV viewing by UNICEF Manila in 2000 were done for the sake of media education. Another significant MIL milestone in the Philippines happened when two notable professors one from the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication (AIJC) and one from Mirriam College took part in the First International Forum on Media and Information Literacy 2011 held in Fez, Morocco. Prof. Ramon Tuazon became a co-author of the book developed by UNESCO which is the Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers while Prof. Jose Reuben Alagaran of Miriam College back then presented a significant paper on MIL.

UNESCO's MIL Curriculum for Teachers has been gradually adopted in the Philippines. Although media literacy and education were integrated into some basic education curricula in private schools in the 1980s, the combined concept of media literacy and information literacy into MIL is relatively new and remains unsystematic. In particular, media literacy is viewed from the narrow perspective that it is limited to communication educators. Similarly, other disciplines view media literacy as a special interest subject that occasionally enlivens classroom discussions. Media Literacy has also been considered as the sole responsibility of parents and schools and not of the media industry. Therefore, developing the MIL Curriculum should deal with the need of teachers to understand the media, evaluate the media content, appreciate MIL, and empower today's children and youth as media "prosumers" or the combination of producers and consumers, to make informed decisions on everyday issues. (Alagaran, 2017).

Moreover, the challenges set on achieving a Media and Information Literate Society might be far from what is envisioned, still, the baby steps and simple attempts to be heard are crucial in reaching Media and Information Literacy in a Spirit of Social Change that Goes Beyond Social Reform.

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