

“We have evidence; they are learning!”
How to enable students to become media literate users
of information resources

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Abstract.

This paper is a review of what current guidelines, standards, and case studies tell us about dimensions of competencies and skills learned through quality media and information literacy activities in universities and libraries.

“We must prepare young people for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds.” UNESCO’s 1982 statement on the importance of promoting media literacy competencies is still highly relevant. Media and information literacy education for young people provides a new pedagogy and framework for an essential 21st century survival skill. According to the National Communication Association (NCA) media literacy is a “fundamental competency for literate citizens”. In 1998 the NCA defined “20 Standards for Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy Education in K-12 Education” which mark the start of conceptualizing and defining competencies in media literacy.

In media-educational contexts, the role of librarians as gatekeepers of the media is recognized as vital. With the emergence of the umbrella concept of information literacy, their role as teachers in media and information literacy instruction has been redefined to support the learning process as mediators and partners. Developments in media education and digital technologies have spurred academic librarians to new breakthroughs in integrating information and technology skills into the curriculum in higher education.

In practice, librarians and media educators often disagree about the role of media or information literacy in the library or within the curriculum in school or university. For example, academic librarians engaged in IL instruction aim to train students in specific skills of information retrieval and not in meta-competencies required for lifelong learning. This understanding of information literacy is challenged by information professionals who believe that this focus is too narrow: their approach centers on the importance of educating students or library users in a broad manner in order to participate in a complex information society.

But how can information professionals help students to develop the technical and critical-thinking skills necessary to navigate information in all media? What lessons have been learned from teaching students to use electronic information resources for education and science purposes? My poster is a review of what current guidelines, standards, and case studies tell us about dimensions of competencies and skills learned through quality media and information literacy activities in universities and libraries.

In summary, research tells us that in a comprehensive approach to media and information literacy students learn *about* media and *with* media:

Learning *with* media teaches them how to access, use, and communicate with (new) media in productive ways.

Learning *about* media helps them to understand, analyze, and interpret the ideas and concepts they encounter.

Information professionals should support their learners to engage with media critically and analytically. This assumes a didactic focus that is centered on independent learning and higher level thinking. Furthermore, constructivist teaching approaches highlight the importance of context to the learning process. Following IFLA's "Guidelines on Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning" a constructivist approach focuses on students engaging with information to solve a problem, thereby creating new understanding through active investigation and thought, as opposed to memorizing facts presented in class lectures. Students are enabled to become qualified learners: they are "learning to learn". This is the basis for lifelong learning.

In particular, my review of literature identifies at least 5 important target dimensions of competencies that can be divided into 15 key skills which young people must acquire in order to use media resources in an appropriate way.

The 5 target dimensions are:

Learning with media, which means to be able

1. to access and use information / media
2. to communicate with media

Learning about media, which means to be able

3. to analyze media
4. to produce media
5. to understand information society

Some of the key skills that enable students to become media literate users of information resources are the abilities:

- to locate, access, process information;
- to use appropriate technology and to collaborate with (new) media;
- to develop technical competencies and to understand media messages;
- to recognize media constructions of reality.

These elaborated competencies and skills are crucial for the development of successful lifelong learners in a constantly changing world. The matrix that I will present in the INFORUM poster session could be helpful to information professionals and educators starting to develop media curricula and aiming to promote a systematic approach to media and information literacy instruction.

Sources:

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