Participants in the [mla] as opinion leaders in school media education

Results of the study "Media literacy in school media projects"

Magdalena Tschautscher

In the theoretical part of the study on the importance of the media literacy *award [mla]* various approaches and phases of development of media literacy are thematized. This examination forms the basis for the empirical part for which a quantitive online survey was made with teachers that had taken part in a media competition of the Federal Ministry of Education, Art, and Culture. Data was collected on theoretical knowledge about media literacy, the self-assessment of one's own media literacy, the importance of the competition in the process of dealing with the subject, and the personal opinion about media competitions of this nature. The study showed that, in the main, teachers who took part in the [mla] knew a great deal about media literacy and that they also used this knowledge in practice.

The Issues

Media texts are highly regarded in society and are central to the world of culture. Without doubt they are presently the most important means of cultural communication (cf. Hobbs 2007, p. 6; Buckingham 2003, p. 5). Thus the engagement with media in various contexts can be regarded as one essential task for today's society. Nevertheless, active media work—both in and outside school—is very closely connected to the commitment of individuals (cf. Hobbs 2007). They take on the role of *opinion leaders* or *early adopters*. Those teachers who participate in the [mla] can be counted amongst those who invest time and attention to media work.

Because of this role they harbour great potential for providing information about active media work. Who are the teachers that are so committed to media work in schools? In this context this is the overriding question. Looked at from the point of view of scientific research, the following relevant components were examined:

theoretical knowledge about media literacy, some of the teachers' skills in their personal use of media, the transfer of media literacy in the classroom, the reasons for participating in the [mla] and its importance.

These question elements were answered in a preliminary survey using an online questionnaire. All of the teaching staff who took part in the media competitions up till 2009 were included. In a mix of standardized and open-ended questions with differing emphasis on items, the answers provide new insight into the skills, opinions, and characteristics of a special target group who are regarded here as future-oriented pioneers of media work in schools. These results are discussed below.

Theoretical knowledge about media literacy

There is a tendency for teachers who participated in the [mla] to have a high level of theoretical knowledge. Numerous aspects which are fundamental to the concept of media literacy are regarded by the teachers as essen-

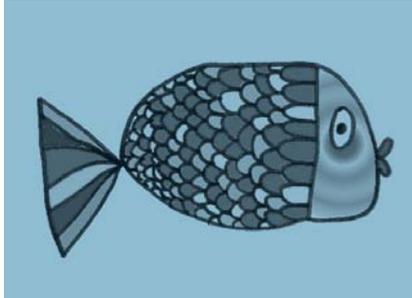
The Media Around Us

Prize-winner 2007, Media Education

(Living) Pictures

Main prize 2009, Print

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Darwin's Journey with the Beagle (Powerpoint)

Main prize 2009, Media Education

Show me the way to the next whiskey bar … (Animated film)

Prize-winner 2009, Video

School Breakfast for Nicaragua (Radio report)

Prize-winner 2009, Radio

tial. Thus over 90 per cent of those asked regarded the world in which the pupils lived as the starting point for media work and almost 100 per cent ascribe great importance to an examination and assessment of popular media. In addition, over 80 per cent of the teachers consider that personal expression through media and a critical concern with it are central issues. It should also be emphasised that over 90 per cent regard creating a media product to be a substantial factor, equal in weight to reflection.

Further results confirm the theoretical knowledge of the teachers questioned. Thus close to 95 per cent of them postulate a self-determined and discriminating use of media. In addition over 80 per cent hold knowledge of the media system as a whole to be important and around 90 per cent see a self-reflective use of media as a

central aspect. There was a tendency for a high proportion of those asked to regard elements which could be ascribed to an exaggeratedly conservative educational paradigm as not applying to media literacy. Thus over 80 per cent denied that skills for dealing with media are static and that media literacy is only relevant in one class. About 50 per cent of the teachers did not regard involvement with media literacy as a means of protecting pupils from the influence of the media as essential. Here, a critical remark has to be made that the other half do, indeed, exhibit a tendency to want to provide protection from negative media influences.

To summarize: a large proportion of respondents had a theoretical knowledge of media literacy. What we are talking about here are components such as critical consideration of media content, the equal weighting of production and reflection, personal expression via media, taking the world of the pupils into account as a starting point for media work, and encouraging a critical, self-reflective use of media throughout the entire curriculum.

Self-declared skills with regard to media literacy

The information gathered about self-assessment in respect of media literacy shows that a very large proportion of the teachers who took part in the *[mla]* are competent in their use of media. Over 70 per cent consider the technology used in each medium, think about the degree to which content is influenced by the technical component, and regard the conditions of production for each medium as important. As far as their own personal media interests were concerned, over 90 per cent of those asked were interested in who was responsible for the content of the media and think about which strategies are used to reach the public involved.

Equally, teachers' competency in respect of their own use of media can be established with regard to the language of media. Thus over 90 per cent showed a fundamental interest in the linguistic means used in media messages and think about the effects this has. Furthermore, almost 100 per cent are aware that media language varies according to the media genre. Thus they also think about the influence this has on conveying meaning. In regard to the representative function of media, the study shows 100 per cent of the teachers are aware of media influence on social groups. Over 90 per cent of

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Magdalena Tschautscher

those think about depicted and excluded social groups. In this context there is almost a 100 per cent clarity about clichéd representations and the means by which these are achieved.

In addition, the investigation reveals that, for the most part, the teachers who responded regard themselves as competent in their role as target person for the media. In percentage terms this means that over 80 per cent have a fundamental interest in which target groups are addressed and which content is used for the purpose. Going on for 70 per cent of the teachers think about whether they themselves also belong to a particular target group. It should be noted here that there is a tendency for this not to apply to the remaining third.

The conclusion about the teachers' own skills, based on self-assessment, is as follows: in the main participants in the [mla] have a well-developed media literacy. In summary, their personal use of media is critical and reflective and exhibits an awareness of the problematic aspects of media use. This permits the conclusion that said persons are able to combine their theoretical knowledge with their practical use of media.

Media literacy in the classroom

The study presents an unequivocal picture with regard to media literacy feeding into classroom teaching. As far as teachers who took part in the [mla] are concerned, elements of media literacy feed into their classes in various ways. On the one hand this can be deduced from the frequency of media use and the types on media used and, on the other, from the motives for using media in the teaching situation.

All of the respondent group used a very wide spectrum of types of media with divergent frequency. Varying between multiple use per week and once a month, more than 70 per cent used the media television, beamers, books, computers, internet, newspapers, magazines, CD players, and learning software. There is a tendency for over 50 per cent of the teachers to use the media film projector and video camera in teaching seldom or never. For a number of those asked, media literacy elements were introduced as a subject in the classroom by using them. Thus over 90 per cent thematized influence by using media and pupils' experiences with the media. Likewise over 90 per cent of the teachers who took part

in the [mla] used media in the classroom in order to carry out a critical analysis of media content and to design their own media products. Almost 100 per cent of respondents made the form a media uses for conveying content (e.g. language) and socially critical aspects of society the subject of discussion by consciously using various types of media. Over 90 per cent of the respondent teachers used media in order to be able to take up the subjects of the representation of various social groups and the economic and organisational basis for media products in the classroom situation.

As far as these components are concerned, because of the frequency and way in which media are used, it can be taken as established that elements of media literacy feed into the teaching situation. This ranges from the conscious use of media to discuss socially critical aspects of society through to the production of content design for individual media products.

Personal motivation for taking part in the [mla]

To a large extent the grounds for taking part in the [mla] and the benefits of doing so overlap. In sum, a central aspect for participation, reported by about 50 per cent, is the recognition and the possibility of presenting media projects outside the school. For about 40 per cent

Shoe Stories
(Internet)
Main prize 2009,
New Media

Flooo – school
magazine with
online edition
Prize-winner 2007,
Print

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the contact, comparison, and exchange with like-thinking colleagues takes the foreground. The desire for feedback on completed projects and for reflection on work accomplished were named as both benefit and motive but were only significant for less than 20 per cent of the teachers. 20 per cent also regarded the experience and information they received as a gain (and thus a benefit) though not a motivating factor to take part. In sum, for around 35 per cent simple interest and enjoyment in taking part were both grounds and benefits. Furthermore, for around five per cent image improvement/prestige was an argument for submitting the media project to the *[mla]*.

As one can deduce from respondents' answers, the *[mla]* not only offers teachers the opportunity to present their project but also, and equally, to exchange information on the subject of media literacy with others using a larger platform. Recognition outside the individual schools is a further essential aspect that makes the *[mla]* possible.

The importance of the [mla] in the development of media literacy

The [mla] is aimed at encouraging engagement with media and offering school media work a platform. But how is this media project situated in relation to the development of media literacy? 60 per cent of the teachers asked had already been involved with the subject prior to their participation in the *[mla]*. Nevertheless around 70 per cent of the respondents agreed that because of the *[mla]* their involvement with the subject of media literacy had increased.

According to the assessment of over 90 per cent of the teachers who took part in the *[mla]*, the media competition contributes to disseminating the concept of media literacy, encourages involvement with media in schools, and, as a result, alters the way of dealing with media there. The same proportion agreed that participation in the [mla] encouraged involvement with socially critical subject matter. Over 95 per cent of respondents agreed that because of the *[mla]* pupils were provided with insight into the use of media and that a critical as well as reflective handling of media is thereby promoted. Once again 95 per cent of teachers confirmed that the *[mla]* provided a stimulus to produce media content and encouraged personal expression skills though the use of media.

All in all, the *[mla]* is important for the development of media literacy in as much as the various elements of the subject are stimulated, thus resulting in an increased participation in the media competition.

**Media work in schools in the future**

Since the members of the group of those asked are regarded as opinion leaders, the suggestions and wishes they articulate for future media work in schools are particularly interesting. On the one hand the teachers' answers refer to the organisational aspects of school media work and, on the other to the contents. Thus they demand better technical and financial resources, more time, and more further training possibilities in the

Homo sapiens
Prize-winner 2007, Video

L.E.B.E.
(Street Interviews)
Prize-winner 2007, Video
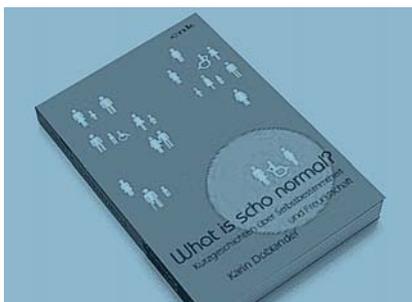
What's Normal Anyway?
(Book and Marketing)
Main Prize 2007, Print

Participants in the [mla] as opinion leaders in school media education
Results of the study "Media literacy in school media projects"

Magdalena Tschautscher

subject of media. Relating to content, the teachers postulate a general platform which would provide the opportunity for exchange and the archiving of material. Along with this, respondents expressed wishes for contact partners and expertise as well as giving the subject a higher profile in public awareness.

Conclusion

Teachers who took part in the *[mla]* are rightly regarded as *opinion leaders/ early adopters*. They are characterized by a high level of theoretical knowledge which they apply to their own use of media. But they do not only apply their knowledge to media they use, it also clearly feeds into their teaching. Socio-demographic characteristics make it possible to conclude that respondents were, in the main, experienced teachers who work with media in schools, usually as 'lone wolves'. So it is not surprising that most of them would like more support, recognition, and contact with like-minded partners.

The *[mla]* is of particular relevance in this context because it provides exactly that for these interested teachers. The media competition serves as a platform and makes an active contribution to the development of media literacy and increases public awareness. Together the [mla] project and the participating teachers are a successful example of how media take place can work in schools and how much of the potential contained in the subject area of media literacy is waiting to be used.

Re/artions
(Art Project/ Website)
Prize-winner 2008, New Media

NationalratsQual [National Election Torment] 2008
(Feature)
Prize-winner 2008, Radio

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