



ÉDUCATION & CULTURE INFOS

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Editorial

The economic and financial crisis currently experienced by our countries will weigh heavily on the most vulnerable of our fellow citizens and on those without resources. It can only increase the appalling inequality that exists on our planet and our continent. For months, however, there has been a succession of statements, which, for the most part have been reassuring, soothing or just wrong. It is very difficult to obtain reliable information and to take appropriate responsibility.

Never before have populations been confronted in this way by new challenges that involve their loss of control over their local, national and international environment.

The mass of information that is available daily doubtless leads to a feeling of belonging to a global community, but the paradox is that it also contributes to a feeling of isolation, to turning in on oneself and to a superficial awareness of what is going on.

The media contribute to the way in which we become aware of the "global village" no less than to disarray in confronting cultural development, changing ideas, the intermingling of populations and intergenerational conflict.

Education for the media has an important function as the problem is universal; how can people be informed, how can they gain real understanding, how can we ensure that social cohesion is sustained, that there is education and interest and therefore that citizens become knowledgeable, aware and responsible?

The INGO Conference is changing: there are very proper fundamental changes in its structure and in the way it works. The Groupings are becoming Commissions and there are changes in the number of commissions as well as in their areas of competence.

A new Chairperson of the Education and culture Commission will be elected on 3 October.

I would like to express my thanks to you all, for the amount of work that you have done and for the quality of what we have achieved together.

In these years I have been happy and ... proud to work in our Grouping and that in an effective manner.

Thank you again....

Alain Mouchoux.

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EDUCATION FOR THE MEDIA

The place, the function, the development and the influence of the media on our societies require thought, analysis and suggestions on the part of civil society.

In the future we shall have always to live with the universal presence of the media which are in a state of continuous development; it will entail our having to use the amazing capacity that the media have developed in respect of knowledge, the sharing of information, communication, democracy and openness of spirit, while also trying to master the excesses, the risks of being influenced and the dangers that exist for social cohesion and private life.

Awareness and education for the media, therefore, assume a fundamental importance for the future of our societies and it is right that civil society organisations should undertake a determined engagement in this direction so that throughout their lives all European citizens should feel that they are concerned by developments in the media, that they should have access to them and that education should enable them to acquire the competence to use and master them.

The media today include to all that relates to communication and to its vectors that is to real and virtual exchange. The media make use of screens, whether those of television, the cinema, the computer, the portable telephone or of video games. Clearly the media include the press in its written form, books and obviously the radio.

No one can avoid the media in daily life, in professional, social or cultural activity or in leisure time. There are very few areas of human interaction which are not subject to the media whether on the local, national or international level. The media are present everywhere throughout our lives from the youngest age. They have an affect on the way see, hear and feel things as well as on the ... brain or intellect.

It is not a matter of opposing developments or of shutting one's eyes to their existence or influence, that is to refuse to use the media. Rather it is a matter of continuing to engage with and to master them. The fact is that the media develop inexorably in quantity if not in quality and become increasingly "nomadic" through their financial interconnection while also becoming more widely based. Technological possibilities are increasing, the media are interconnected (called "the convergence of the media") while the different media also influence and complement one another.

Technological development experienced by the media and their improvement mean that it is ever more difficult really to understand them; for example distinction between the "reality" of one picture and the "virtual" nature of another, without engaging the always considerable inducement for investors and advertisers, if not politicians, to resort to subliminal images to "extol" or even more to sell their products!

The media are therefore a real power, of the extent of which we should be aware.

There is no substitute for the work of the media because they result in the knowledge and information needed by all citizens: they therefore facilitate the exercise of one of the rights of each human being, to be informed, to encounter ideas, to give expression to their freedom of thought and opinion and to respect the freedom of others.

Many studies demonstrate the influence of the development of the mass media on our outlook, on the development of ideas even without taking account of the worldwide and long term consequences of their lifelong use. It is therefore a good thing to develop a programme of integrated research in those areas so as to value their medium and long term effect on our social behaviour.

On average adolescents spend an average of 1400 hours a year in front of a screen of one kind or another, that is twice as long as the time spent in school. Furthermore, on average children between the age of 4 and 10 spend two hours a day in front of the television.

This use of the media can be a considerable opportunity for development in our societies by making more and better information available about other people, about the Other, as well as in understanding other cultures, civilisations and other ways of living in the context of intercultural dialogue, which is always in need of development and inspiration.

The amount, the excess of information both available and received does not necessarily imply knowledge or quality: - it is an essential cultural challenge for social cohesion that should be taken into account as we become aware of the negative image provided all too often especially by minority groups

This process of immersion in the world of information requires the relaunching if not the development of real education for the media especially that of the visual image...

The enormous and continuous intrusion of the media in public life is not always accompanied by awareness, by realisation or by the education necessary in this field. Educating people to the visual image, to its perception, to its meaning, to what it symbolises, to its form and to its use from the youngest age and throughout life remains a major and enduring challenge for our societies. For example the immediate nature of the visual image, the way in which it is perceived, its emotional power have an effect on individuals and on collective outlooks which require the development of critical analytic capacity and of judgement.

We know, for example, that young children find it difficult to distinguish between advertising and a television broadcast... and that, in this way, they become a particular target for food advertisements.

Another example is that we must be particularly careful about the way in which the image of women is represented in the media, the way in which it is "used" in advertising and we need to watch out for the trivialisation of what is serious, improper use of video games, of blogs, of portable telephones when they are a means of sharing obscenity or of sending shots of degrading, violent or untrue incidents or in providing false news.

Many parents are not aware of the effect of films or video games on their own children's mental balance and on that of young people in general.

It is useful to take note of a number of items of research showing that repeated violence on television, in films and in video games has had an effect on the behaviour of adolescents or adults who have instigated acts of violence; they affirm that they have been affected by films or video games or by types of activity made available on the Internet.

Other scientific studies - refuted by the media and in particular by those who produce video games - show that there are several stages in those processes that lead to aggressive behaviour: first there is imitation followed by becoming accustomed to something, then repeated viewing leads to desensitisation: next people pass from inhibition to lack of inhibition, where the viewer assesses the consequence of scenes of violence then makes their violence part of himself before going on to imitation; furthermore there is a loss of insight and acts of violence come to be regarded as normal by desensitisation!

This is a good example of the need to provide better information, to do something about programmes and material that exhibit extreme violence, about sexist messages that favour racial hatred, for the media, particularly the audio-visual media in whatever form have an influence on the way in which individuals perceive social reality.

It is a **task for civil society** that it should be vigilant in this field and that it should involve itself in everything that, by the means of the media, can represent democratic, social, cultural and educational progress, while denouncing anything that threatens collective human dignity of that of the individual.

That is why **Education for the Media** must be focussed on the diverse elements of society by which they are used; it involves all social partners, it relates equally to formal and non-formal education. For it is by a coherent approach and activity, for example those of the family or young people of teachers and educators, but also of media professionals themselves, aimed at a code of professional practice in the field of information (journalists, producers, production managers) that it will be possible to enable the media to fulfil their role in providing information, in culture, in leisure and in social integration for the benefit of all.

As we know this is achieved through a real process of integrated education and formation that continues through the different age groups whether in school, university or in the field of adult education, throughout life, so as to help all individuals better to understand their environment, to improve their knowledge and better to live out their citizenship.

Clearly associations, NGOs, have a fundamental function that they should realise at all levels, on the ground, in all areas of life, in respect of multiple partnership with the media themselves and with local and regional collectivities and bodies that specialise in education for the media. It is important to avail oneself of their practical knowledge and experience.

To ensure that effect is given to Education for the Media and to its improvement, the training of teachers and people involved in education, whether initial training or inservice education, is of fundamental importance; it must involve awareness, the imparting of key skills and it must be included in the content of teaching programmes.

Many practical activities have provided hard evidence for a number of years and in several countries that from the youngest age it is possible to make the media "one's own"; obviously with complete access and by learning how to use the media, but also in giving young people an opportunity to use their critical faculties as well as enabling them to be responsible when confronted with different kinds of information.

In this respect, learning to produce information and in that way to enhance communication and exchange in schools and beyond, is an admirable form of synthesis, developed with the young themselves: for example school newspapers, which young people write and publish themselves, or short television programmes which are very encouraging because they show that in this way people can use and master the media and that innovation in this field develops a connection between education and its context!

Alain Mouchoux

EDUCATION FOR THE MEDIA

PROPOSAL FOR A STATEMENT

The media are of increasingly widespread significance. They develop and become unceasingly more complex. In future the media will cover all aspects of human relations which they reflect and influence in turn.

Education for the Media is, therefore, essential in giving to each individual the capacity to live in information society, with its capacity for communication and knowledge, so that he or she can understand it and master it with a view to achieving better and more effective involvement in public and democratic life in his own country and at an international level.

Education for the media, which is an aspect of education for citizenship, contributes in this way to the education of citizens to understand their social, cultural, economic and political environment.

Every citizen or future citizen should be able to exercise his right to liberty of information, of opinion and expression. Citizens should be able to analyse and identify content, strategy, political, social and cultural interest, to exercise choice, to make judgements and to take responsibility.

The media should contribute to education for democracy, to equality, to peace, to tolerance, to liberty, to defence of the environment. They should also help in the struggle against racism, xenophobia and stereotypes; they should, in particular, give more importance to and more space for national and cultural minority expression.

Already present in several European countries, in different forms, education for the media should be better known, more widespread, more developed, more specific and more effective because, all too often, it depends on personal initiative, individual goodwill or on associations limited in time and space.

It is also good to further the cause of research in this field education for the media.

Education for the media is a matter for everyone, from the beginning of childhood and right through life. It contributes to "learning to learn".

In the first instance it is a matter of granting the public access to the media, especially to the internet, and of providing markers or guidelines for users and "consumers", which help to develop a critical spirit, that enables people to situate themselves in the minefield of information and signs, and so to interpret, connect, place in order of importance, understand and exercise their own right of interpretation and understanding.

At the same time it is a matter of developing key competencies connected to the use of the media so as to influence and control them, to create messages and to innovate.

Systems of education at all levels are the first line of activity, not only because the media transform the way in which knowledge is acquired but also because they form the personality of future citizens and educate people "for life". This education therefore concerns and involves all who are involved in the educational process, young people themselves, teachers and others working in education, parents and those who contribute to school life in a partnership particularly aimed at dealing with these issues.

As an element in educational programmes in both the education and in-service education of teachers and others involved in education, education for the media should enable people, from the youngest age, better to read, look at and understand information and visual images, their meaning ("virtual reality") and better to communicate, for instance in producing school newspapers; it should also teach them to use the media, to express themselves by means of the media, to create new forums for discussion and space for dialogue so that they become a powerful aid for social intercourse.

The role of parents and families should be reaffirmed in this context since they maintain the link between schools and family to make educational coherence more effective in combating the lack of capacity really to understand the media.

The partnership should be a developed in the context of non formal education carried out particularly by associations, NGOs and with different institutions such as libraries, multimedia organisations, museums and in all other places were it is necessary to develop programmes of awareness and of introduction to the use of the media.

In this many-facetted educational process, the role of media professionals (television, cinema, newspaper companies, producers, journalists) is to take effective account of the need to involve the media in adult education as well as in educational systems at the University!

The influence of the media is a phenomenon in society. It is a task for civil society as a whole as well as for authorities entrusted with political and administrative matters, for the European Institutions, to encourage and give effect to education for the media for the benefit of all and therefore for democracy.

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