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New Questions, New Insights, New Approaches

Contributions to the Research Forum at the World Summit on Media for Children and Youth 2010

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In this book, a number of scholars from Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America and Europe elaborate on "Media Literacy and Education", "Children, Media, Consumption and Health", "Media Ethics and Social Responsibility", and "Communication for Social Change" from different perspectives. The variety of realities and examples presented here offer the readers insightful approaches, dealing with inequalities and discrimination caused by lack of education, low literacy, gender, ethnicity, and class, among other factors. As a sort of response, a transversal concept can be identified which is threaded through the sections and articles: young people's participation, which presents itself as a challenge and an opportunity to foster citizenship and inclusion.

The first section proposes some guidelines and recommendations for children's TV and media education for democracy. It starts with Dafna Lemish's conceptual framework for producing quality TV for children around the world. After interviewing 135 media professionals from 65 countries, she develops eight main principles: equality (girls and boys are treated equally and have equal roles and opportunities on TV); diversity (wide range and variety of characters); complexity (more complex, rounded and non-stereotypical characters); similarity (emphasis on traits shared between girls and boys); unity (relationships and friendship between boys and girls constructed on equal terms); family (supportive and caring family roles); authenticity (true-to-life characters, narratives and social contexts); voicing (to present perspectives of children). Ibrahim Saleh's article attempts to answer the question "What underlies children, media and democracy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)?" He concludes that in a media context which gives no attention to children or democracy and is characterized by self-censorship and opinionated reporting, the focus should lie on children's media skills and on the construction of media accountability.

The chapter on "Media Literacy and Education" provides an overview of the issue by presenting examples and case studies of the impact of media education, as well as indicators to measure media literacy. Here, Renee Hobbs, Henry Cohn-Geltner and John Landis introduce three case studies performed during a month-long educational program in the summer: "Comprehending news and creating a news broadcast" (Grade 2/3), "Exploring pop-culture controversy through a mock trial" (Grade 4), and "Talking back to the news media" (Grade 5). The program consisted of teaching about news and journalism, and carrying out activities involving reading, viewing and discussing news and current events. In their article they elaborate on how these examples activated some of the seven processes that represent an expanded conceptualization of the media literacy empowerment model. The following article by Chi-Kim Cheung explains the study of the impact of media education on students' media analysis skills in Hong Kong. This research used a multiple-method approach consisting of questionnaires (pre- and post-test), carrying out interviews with media education teachers and students, as well as media education lesson observations. The study confirms the effectiveness of media education in improving students' media analysis skills, at least over a short period of time. With the goal of bridging the gap between Brazilian filmmakers and viewers, Esther Hamburger promoted several film screenings and debates at universities, public schools and in community organizations. These debates challenged old forms of discrimination and stereotyped representations, and "confronted the ways in which contemporary favela situation film both offend and fascinate peripheral viewers" (pp. 90). According to the researcher, these encounters proved intense and productive. The analyses of the data collected showed that the professionals involved in these debates revisit and recreate theories, practices and philosophical principles of democratic education. In the final contribution to this section, Samy Tayie presents a case study from Egypt and reports on the findings of a qualitative pilot study on children's use of new media carried out among Egyptian children from one urban and one rural area. One of the findings states that children from Fayoum – the rural area – use traditional media more than the children in Cairo.

Building on Henry Jenkins' (2009) work, José Manuel Pérez Tornero and Mireia Pi propose a new style of media education based on new competences, critical understanding, creativity and participation. This is the conclusion

from developing a pyramidal model which combines the dimensions and criteria for measuring media literacy levels and the ways in which they are interrelated. The base of the pyramid is formed by environmental factors: a set of contextual factors related to media education, media policy, cultural environment, citizens' rights, role of the media and civil society, etc. The second level consists of individual competences, such as use skills, critical understanding and communicative and participative abilities. The apex of the pyramid represents communicative abilities, the manifestation of media literacy levels, whose quality rests on the success or failure of the lower levels.

The "Children, Media, Consumption and Health" part reveals the importance of the multiple methods approach "to produce deeper, grounded, and nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in studying the role of media and consumption in children's healthy development and well(-)being" (pp. 107). Here, the reader will find research conducted in Hong Kong (Kara Chan), the Middle East and North Africa (Ibrahim Saleh), Unites States (Kathryn Montgomery et al.) and Colombia (Arvind Singhal), focusing on tween girls' sexuality and media scandals, media's sexual and reproductive health taboos, digital marketing and childrens' health, as well as children, media and health advocacy. These "cross(-)cultural comparisons allow us to identify themes, aspects, or concerns that cut across different nations" (pp. 107).

In the section "Media Ethics and Social Responsibility", Sonia Livingstone reflects on emerging governance practices in the United Kingdom, the European Union and United States. She draws on findings from the EU Kids Online research network across 25 European countries to suggest four factors which should guide the future research agenda and policy priorities: online opportunities and online risks; online and offline risks; risk and harm; and finally, sources of vulnerability and resilience. Also with public policy as the focal point, Divina Frau-Meigs elaborates on the relationship among media literacy, digital access, inclusion and participation, proposing a seven competence framework, while Manisha Pathak-Shelat's article contrasts India's digital revolution and youth media policy efforts. Finally, Tatiana Merlo-Flores explains the development of indicators to measure social impact of media on children, and Sirkku Kotilainen presents the preliminary results of an ongoing comparative international project on youth media participation.

The chapter "Communication for social change" discusses the role of communication and media in the relationship between youth and social change, viewing it through an empirical lens. Here, different initiative/country combinations are presented: a digital youth magazine in Belarus (Iryna Vidanava), an NGO-driven program on youth participation in Malawi, and a study on mobile phone use and gender identity in Iran (Ece Algan). The closing article (Thomas Tufte and Florencia Enghel) offers an excellent conclusion to this section by providing an interesting reflection on the notion of citizenship in the context of globalization, connecting it to the role of media and communication in the articulation of new forms of citizenship practices.

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Reference:

Jenkins, H. (2009): Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture, Media Education for the 21st Century: MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts.