

UNIT 7: A class newspaper

Understanding media by producing media

All over the world, the presence and impact of media has increased over the last few years. The more complex and interdependent our lives become, the more we all rely on information to understand the influences and developments that affect us. For any piece of information on matters beyond our range of personal experience and immediate perception, we must rely on a medium of information.

However, individual access to different media varies widely. This affects a person's level of information and his potential to exercise influence and power. A further important aspect is the issue of censorship and the problem of misinformation by parties, governments and powerful lobbies. Conflict, including social change or warfare, gives rise to monopolised and distorted information.

Although these interrelationships, to name but a few, will not be explicitly addressed in this unit on media, the students will discover elements of them when they compare the print media of their country or their region and judge them by specific criteria.

The approach to media education in this unit is different. By producing their own wall newspaper, the students will gain some insight into newspaper production and thus learn something about the reality of media "from within". Teaching experience has shown that this approach gives students a form of direct access to print media that is more remote from their daily lives. The students will view this type of media critically and will also evaluate electronic media, and their own use of these different kinds of media, from a new perspective. They will develop media literacy.

Finally, one practical hint: this unit, in particular, demands and offers potential for cross-curricular teaching and co-operation. Writing and revising texts could take place as part of language teaching, while designing the layout might be a task in art class. In some cases, a class may have to start on its own, with an additional input by an editing team of students who are particularly interested.

The wall newspaper may have to be present in school life for some time before other teachers will be sufficiently convinced of its worth to join in.

Learning for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights

Media literacy is one of the keys to an overall objective in human rights and civic education – the active, participating citizen. Here is a summary of the most important aspects of media literacy:

1. Competence of communication refers to the general manner in which human beings interact with each other. Social reality does not exist as such. Rather, it is jointly defined by humans through social interaction, which means it is created by acts of communication. This general communicative competence begins with learning our mother tongue and is developed further by using this competence in public.
2. Every human being has this communicative competence from birth. We are endowed with this competence by nature, but it needs to be educated, practised and refined.
3. Media literacy is included in the overarching concept of communicative competence. It refers to the complex multitude of media, the use of which needs to be learned and practised through, for example, being set as a task for students. Print media, including the wall newspaper, are important means of everyday communication, which students should be familiar with. However, they are no more than one element within the overall goal of media literacy.

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Lesson title	Objectives	Student tasks	Resources	Method
Lesson 1: The newspapers around us	The students are introduced to a variety of print media. They understand the differences in content structure.	The students collect and analyse newspapers and magazines that are commonly read in their communities. They create a poster to record their results.	Newspapers, scissors, glue, large sheets of paper.	Group work.
Lesson 2: Our newspaper is the best... don't you agree?	The students clarify the criteria for a good newspaper or magazine. They become aware of their own outlook, values and interests.	The students assess the presentations by the other groups and agree on compromises.	Presentations prepared in the previous lesson. Matrix on blackboard or flip chart.	Group presentations, plenary discussion and assessment.
Lesson 3: We produce our wall newspaper	In groups, the students agree on a range of topics and objectives. They cooperate in the group, sharing their own ideas and competences with the team.	The students decide on the structure of their jointly produced newspaper. They identify topics that are relevant for their school and write an article for their section of the wall newspaper.	Depending on the material resources available, the results will range from handwritten texts to computer printouts with digital photographs.	Making joint decisions, group work.
Lesson 4: Our first issue!	In an open discussion, the students understand what is involved in continuing the wall newspaper project. They are able to make a decision and to take responsibility for it.	The students must form opinions and decide about their future involvement in a follow-up project.	Blackboard or flip chart.	Plenary discussion.

Background material for teachers

Three dimensions of developing media literacy

1. The first dimension: judgment of media

Judgment of media may be summed up in the ancient Greek verb *Κρίνειν* (krinein), which originally meant “to distinguish” and referred to the permanent acquisition and reflexivity of knowledge and experience.

Media judgment is media analysis. This analytic sub-dimension refers to the competence to perceive and understand developments in society, such as the process of concentration within the media business that may jeopardise the function of media in a democratic society. In this example, it is important to know who owns which newspaper and how many types of media are owned by the same company. However, we should not forget that media are run as commercial enterprises that must yield a profit. And whether we like it or not, the more interdependent and globalised our lives become, the more we need to rely on media. Media analysis enables us to judge media developments critically – to make distinctions – so that we can adequately make use of our media literacy.

The (self-) reflexive sub-dimension means that we should be able to link and apply our analytical potential and knowledge to ourselves and our personal sphere of action. Particularly when dealing with media, we have a strong tendency to talk about “the others” and to ignore our personal involvement.

The capability to analyse and reflect includes a third sub-dimension, ethical concern for others, that balances and defines analytical thinking and self-reflexiveness in terms of social responsibility.

2. The second dimension: knowledge about media

Here we refer to the “pure” knowledge about media and media systems. This can be divided into two sub-dimensions.

The sub-dimension of information includes basic knowledge such as how journalists go about their work, the types of programmes that are broadcast by TV and radio, the reasons for a viewer’s preferences when watching TV and how a computer can be used so that it effectively serves the user’s needs.

The sub-dimension of skills adds to media knowledge the ability to use new equipment without having to read the instruction manuals. This includes the process of “learning by doing” – how to handle a computer, how to access the Internet, how to use a video camera, etc.

3. The third dimension: use of the media

Use of the media may also be divided into two sub-dimensions:

1. Competence in using media products, that is, in receiving and consuming what the media have produced. Watching TV is an example of this. It is an activity during which we need to process what we have seen, and to integrate it into our cognitive structures and our repertoire of imagery. Today, we can enhance our receptive competence not only through reading texts, but also through watching films.
2. Active use of media equipment. This sub-dimension refers to media use in social interaction. Examples are telebanking, teleshopping, video and telephone conferences, traditional and digital photography and video production. The enormous variety of media available gives us the potential to perceive the world not only by receiving information, but also by producing it.

The unit on media focuses on precisely this active use of the media, but includes links to the other two dimensions of media education mentioned above.