Media Literacy and the Hungarian National Core Curriculum – A Curate's Egg

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Abstract

In recent years, Hungary has been frequently criticized about press freedom issues by organizations including Human Rights Watch, Freedom House and others. In the current situation, it is thus imperative to understand how media literacy is positioned in public education. The objective of this paper is to analyze the 2012 education curriculum on media education in Hungary and to evaluate the definitions used for constructing media literacy in the National Core Curriculum (NCC). For doing so I apply tools derived from Critical Discourse Analysis and I seek to identify the educational goals of media literacy education. The new NCC brought along major changes, and it reflected a strengthening of national consciousness. The paper offers insights on how these changes influenced the agenda of media literacy education in Hungary.

Keywords: *media literacy education, Hungary, national curriculum*

Hungarian media literacy activists could be genuinely proud of their achievements. After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, they successfully lobbied for the introduction of the "Culture of the Moving Image and Media Education" subject into the National Core Curriculum by 1996. A real triumph if we take into consideration that globally, as Jolls and Wilson points out, "media literacy is rarely institutionalized in education systems and not taught consistently" (2014, 68).

In contrast Hungary does not score well when it comes to freedom of media: in 2011 the country was downgraded by Freedom House to Partly Free, and its latest report concluded that "there are serious and persistent concerns that the extensive legislative and regulatory changes since 2010 have negatively affected media freedom" (Deutsch Karlekar and Dunham 2014, 12).

Media literacy is a multifaceted and broad concept, but one of the important social issues that it addresses is active citizenship and participation (Martens 2014; Mommers 2013). Lewis and Jhally outline that media literacy can provide people with the "wherewithal for thinking about the limits and possibilities of media systems" (1998, 113), while Thevenin and Mihailidis argue for a media education that "can effectively confront injustice and promote social change" (2012, 61).

In this context the inevitable dilemma arises: How is it possible that a country which is fortunate enough to have media literacy embedded in its public education, it is being criticized when it comes to freedom of speech and freedom of media?

In the current political environment, it is therefore crucial to understand the role of media literacy in Hungarian public education and to find answers to some essential questions: How is media literacy positioned

in the educational system? Is this subject relevant enough to truly empower Hungarian citizens and eventually influence participatory democracy and media freedom?

For solving this puzzle in this paper I will analyze the central educational document, the National Core Curriculum (NCC). By using an analytical framework based on critical discourse analysis (CDA) combined with a series of expert interviews I examine how media literacy is positioned in the NCC. The overall aim is thus to provide a discussion on the Hungarian NCC's definition of media literacy education, and a critical insight on the educational goals of the NCC.

In my paper, I will present first a summary of recent political events in order to understand the context in which one can examine the current state of media literacy education. Next I will briefly describe the Hungarian educational system, followed by the historical overview of media literacy education in Hungary. Afterwards by applying a CDA-inspired framework, I will address the ambiguous relationship of media literacy and the 2012 National Core Curriculum. The paper will end with a discussion on the overall role and future of media literacy education in the Hungarian educational system.

Media Literacy in the Hungarian Political Context and Educational System

The new National Core Curriculum and consequently media literacy education cannot be understood without a glance at the current political context. In general terms the Hungarian political and economic situation can be characterized by a growing role of the state (Ágh and Dieringer 2014, 2).

In 2010 center-right Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Alliance) party won the elections, and for his second period as Hungary's leader, Viktor Orbán led his coalition to a two-thirds majority. The overwhelming majority helped the coalition to pass many laws through parliament that cemented the government's power.

The changes in the political system were quickly followed by changes in the public service media. Senior managers and editors of public service broadcasters were fired. Former editors resulted to hunger strike to protest against news meddling (Bajomi-Lázár 2014).

Rearrangements were in place at the National News Agency as well. The new director of the National News Agency, CsabaBelénessy told a local media outlet after his appointment that "public service media should be loyal to the government and fair to the opposition" and should not be an "enemy of the government" or challenge the "power of the freely (democratically) elected cabinet" ("Belénessy Csaba a köz új szolgálatáról" 2010).

Media legislation saw similar changes: a succession of amended and new laws was put into force through the so-called Hungarian "media law package." The ruling coalition modified the media law without any consultation with either the opposition parties or professional organizations. Initially the new media law (Act CLXXXV of 2010 on Media Services and Mass Media) highlighted that "the exercise of the freedom of the press may not… violate public morals." There was no further definition or explanation on what public morals are.

Numerous international criticisms followed these actions. The European Parliament adopted a resolution in March 2011 in which it warned Hungary that the legislation contravenes OSCE and international standards. The resolution concluded: "[…] there should be a serious, concerted and urgent effort to free the media, particularly the printed press, from content prescriptions, the imposition of sanctions, pre-emptive restraints via registration procedures, and threats to the integrity and anonymity of sources" (Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights 2011).

The Fidesz government continued to make changes in the field of education as well. The reform of the educational system meant first of all centralization: a central governmental agency became the employer of all teachers, and the choice and provision of textbooks became centralized as well. The reform was then followed by severe cuts in funding. The Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI), a cross-national comparative study, bluntly puts it: "As a result of these reforms, the quality of education, the access to education and the efficiency of the education sector have worsened" (Ágh and Dieringer 2014, 8).

The 2012 new core curriculum came to be an important milestone in this transformation. Then Secretary of State for education, Rózsa Hoffman, called the revamp "modern and in line with the latest EU trends," yet in the same time, Hoffman stated that the new NCC will represent "a return to the old traditions and baseline standards of cultural literacy. Around 90 per cent of what high school teachers can teach will be fixed, providing the basis for a unified cultural language throughout Hungary" (Murphy 2012).

The Educational System

In Hungary the government, local authorities and various educational institutions administer and manage education. The Ministry of Human Capacities oversees primary, secondary and tertiary education. Today education in Hungary is compulsory from ages 5 to 16. The educational system is structured as follows: primary (grades 1 to 4), lower secondary (grades 5 to 8) and upper secondary (grades 9 to 12).

The first level of regulation in Hungarian education is the National Core Curriculum, the second are the framework curricula and the third level of regulation are the local curricula. What does this mean in practice? The National Core Curriculum sets the overall goals and aims in education. The Core Curriculum is not built around subjects, but education areas, such as Hungarian Language and Literature, Foreign Languages, Mathematics, Arts etc. The Core Curriculum also notes a number of educational scopes, among them: moral education, national consciousness & patriotic education, citizenship—education for democracy, or family life education. Media literacy also appears among these scopes.

Then the second level of regulation is the framework curriculum. These curricula—based on the goals enshrined in the National Core Curriculum—determine the knowledge requirements for each subject. They serve as the basis for organizing each subject and they also determine the outcome requirements.

The last level of regulation is the local curriculum. In this case, the teaching staff of each school decides upon which framework curricula they want to use in their school by taking into consideration local circumstances.

For a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation of media literacy education and its ambiguous position in the 2012 NCC, I will continue with a short historical review of media education in Hungary.

Media Education in Hungary

We cannot talk about an established date on when media education first appeared in Hungarian schools. However, we can talk about a first type of media literacy education when in the 1960s film aesthetics was introduced in the curriculum of Hungarian literature classes. This was not a unique case as Martens (2010, 8) observes: "historically, media literacy education has often been synonym for learning to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of mass media, especially the cinematic arts." These developments were in concordance with similar changes throughout Western Europe. According to Kubey (2003, 360-361) advancements in film theory and the importance given to film as an art form helped out the development of media studies. And thus "media literacy education received an enormous boost as many European teachers were prepared to take film seriously in a classroom context" (Martens 2010, 8).

In Hungary, the introduction of film aesthetics was part of a larger curriculum reform that aimed to modernize teaching. The policy proponents' biggest achievement was to start a debate on what the role of the moving image can be in public education (Szíjjártó 2007).

As a consequence of the reformed curriculum, the Ministry of Education required literature teachers across the country to teach four hours of film aesthetics per year in secondary schools. An interesting feature of the policy was that, besides these classes, pupils were required to attend compulsory movie screenings at cinemas. This regulation was included in the National Core Curriculum of 1978 and stayed in force until 1995. According to one of the leading specialists in media literacy, LászlóHartai, the majority of these literature

teachers did not received any previous training on film aesthetics and thus they did not have the necessary knowledge to teach this subject. In his manuscript Hartai (n.d.) concluded that this eventually led to the "disappearance" of the film aesthetics topics in the teachers' everyday practice.

On the other hand, interest towards the moving image never really faded since a number of passionate teachers organized extra-curricular activities about film-making and film culture. The extra-curricular classes were mostly held in secondary-level schools across the country. These film-passionate teachers would become important participants in the development of media literacy education. In 1992, these educators met for the first time in Budapest and they decided to form a working group. The main aim of the working group was to lobby for the introduction of film education in the forthcoming new National Core Curriculum.

After a number of meetings and conferences, the Hungarian Government finally accepted in 1996 the "Moving Image Program" to aid the implementation of the new subject, titled "Culture of the Moving Image and Media Education." The new subject was introduced in the Curriculum in the 1998/1999 academic year. In the 2003/2004 academic year media literacy became a compulsory subject for 3rd and 4th graders at secondary schools. From 2005 pupils could further choose the "Culture of the Moving Image and Media Education" as an exam subject for their secondary school final examination. Grades from this examination may count towards matriculation to higher education (Neag 2014, 295).

The current NCC brought along major changes for media literacy education. With the introduction of ethics as a standalone subject in lower secondary level and the mandatory daily physical education classes, a cutback followed in other subjects. As a consequence, on lower secondary level media education classes were removed and media literacy was transformed into a cross-curricular topic.

Media Literacy and the 2012 National Core Curriculum

For a thorough understanding of the media literacy content presented in the National Core Curriculum, I conducted a policy analysis based on critical discourse analysis.

In recent educational policy analysis approaches discourse appears as a central concept (Bowe, Ball, and Gold 1992; Taylor et al. 1997). These approaches "have moved away from the notion of policy as a product (merely enshrined in a policy text) to one which focuses on policy as process" (Hyatt 2013, 836).

For "uncovering" the Hungarian policy process I will follow the footsteps of those scholars who recommend a "new set of tools" (Ball 1990, 18) for understanding policy-making. In doing so, I will use David Hyatt's analytical framework that builds upon "a more linguistic element to supplement and elucidate critical educational policy analysis that draws on a discursive perspective" (Hyatt 2013, 836).

The framework comprises two elements: one that deals with contextualizing and one with deconstructing the policy. The contextualization element, in turn, is composed of two elements: policy levers and drivers—these refer "to expressions of the intended aims or goals of a policy" (Hyatt 2013, 838)—and warrants, or "the justification, authority or «reasonable grounds» established for some act, course of action, statement or belief" (Cochran-Smith and Fries 2001, 4).
The second element deals with deconstructing the policy. This component engages with text and discourse using a number of analytical lenses and tools derived from CDA (Fairclough 1995) and Critical Literacy Analysis (Hyatt 2005).

The above mentioned elements became the building blocks in the analysis of those fragments that deal with media literacy education in the Core Curriculum. For a more nuanced understanding of the policy, these findings were then corroborated by information gathered through expert interviews.
Contextualizing policy on media literacy

When it comes to the intended goals of media literacy policy it is revealing the exact location of this policy in the curriculum. Media literacy education is mentioned for the first time in the development areas.

Contextualising policy

- •Policy levers & drivers: expressions of the intended aims/goals of a policy

- •Warrants: justification for some act/statement

Deconstructing policy

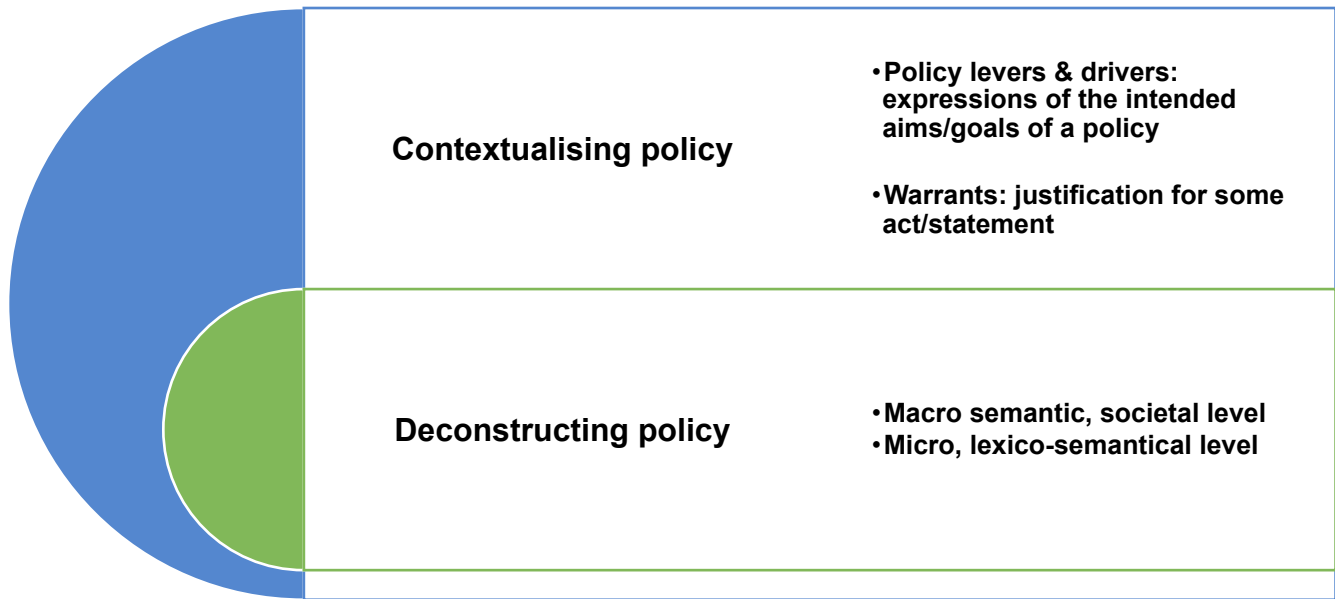- •Macro semantic, societal level
- •Micro, lexico-semantical level

Figure 1: Analytical framework

The development areas or educational goals are positioned as important elements in the process of education. Table 1 presents these goals. According to the NCC's introduction (2012, 10641), the development areas reflect "shared values" and "they incorporate traditional values together with the 21st century's new societal needs." One could presume that this shows a clear interest of the government towards media literacy. Yet when this aspect was pointed out to one of the Hungarian media literacy experts, AndrásLányi (2015) dismissed it as "pedagogical haze. In the development areas policy-makers wrote about an ideal world of education. I don't think that this can help the advancement of the subject."It might be an ideal world, and yet among the thirteen development areas media literacy ranks only as twelfth. Not a significant position, since it is proceeded by areas such as ethics education, national consciousness and patriotic education, citizenship education or the development of self-knowledge and social culture. It is interesting to note here that media literacy education and citizenship education are strictly demarcated, making no connection between the two. The National Core Curriculum (2012, 10644) then goes to expand on what are the goals of media literacy education, as a development area:

> The aim [of media literacy education] is for children to become competent participants of the global mediated public: to understand the language of new and old media. Media literacy education prepares [students] for the culture of participatory democracy and a meaningful and value-based everyday life that is being influenced by the media. It does so through developing a critical attitude and through its action-oriented attitude. Pupils are introduced to: the operation and mechanisms of the media, to the mutual relationship between media and society, to the differentiation between real and virtual, public and confidential and to the importance of these differences' and media characteristics' legal and ethical significance.

For understanding these goals thoroughly, it is important to see what levers are accessible to the Hungarian government. According to Hyatt (2013) levers aid policy-steering, being instruments "the state has at its disposal to direct, manage and shape change in public services… functional mechanisms through which government and its agencies seek to implement policies" (Steer et al. 2007, 177). In educational settings these

Table 1
Hungary's National Core Curriculum Development Areas

DEVELOPMENT AREAS

1. Ethics education

2. National consciousness and patriotic education

3. Civics education

4. Self-knowledge and social culture

5. Family life education

6. Physical and mental health education

7. Responsible living, volunteering

8. Sustainability and environmental awareness

9. Career guidance

10. Economic and finance education

11. Media literacy education

12. Learning to learn

levers can be target-setting, funding, inspection etc. (Hyatt 2013). But it comes to the National Core Curriculum, there are no specific targets set for the different subjects. The NCC serves "as a key reference for authors and editors of framework curricula and local curricula, as well as for the developers of pedagogical programs" (International Bureau of Education 2012). Information on targets, as well as specific details, such as number of hours devoted to each topic are to be found in the framework curriculum of each subject. According László Hartai (2014), one of the experts I interviewed teachers don't actually read this document, since the National Core Curriculum is, a fig leaf, the real regulation is in the frame curricula." Thus the NCC appears to be a cultural instrument that sets the boundaries of public education.

As another important element of contextualization, warrants provide justification for policies. The construction and the debate of policy happen through language and thus they are discursively meditated (Hyatt 2013). Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) identify three types of warrants: evidentiary warrants, accountability warrants, and political warrants. In this case, the political warrant is the strongest since the new curriculum was one of the major milestones of the new Hungarian government's policy changes. Moreover, media literacy education and policy cannot be separated from the warrants of the new National Core Curriculum.

At the news conference where the new curriculum was presented the Minister for Human Resources outlined the fact that this policy document is "timeless and modern" in the same time ("Balog: Időtálló és korszerű az új Nemzeti Alaptanterv" 2012). The minister said that a major, multi-year work preceded the publication of this document, and that the patrons of the Curriculum are respectable professionals.

It is relevant to note here that the new policy is being justified not only in terms of the national interest, but a warrant of authority is also used by outlining that a body made of "respectable professionals" offered their patronage for the policy document. Not there, nor elsewhere though did the minister mention who these professionals were. Later on an article appeared in the press, after journalists asked the ministry for the list of these experts (fn24.hu 2012).

Deconstructing Policy

In the following I will focus on analyzing the policy concerning media literacy education from a macro semantic and societal level, and then turn to the micro, lexico-grammatical level. Since the "[…] key aim of critical approach to analysis resides in attempts to uncover the process of naturalization in any discourse" (Hyatt 2013, 840), I will present a number of relevant aspects regarding media literacy that can be discovered by using analytical lenses and tools derived from CDA.

The Macro Semantic Level. When it comes to policy analysis it is crucial to shed light on how governments justify their actions. According to Fairclough (2003) there are four modes to accomplish legitimation discursively: authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, and mythopoesis (legitimation through narratives).

As mentioned earlier, the Minister of Human Resources used both a moral evaluation and authorization warrant for introducing the new National Core Curriculum. Furthermore, this type of moral evaluation can also be observed by advancing a bit and narrowing our view towards the development areas since media literacy is listed among these.

The development areas expression is used interchangeably with pedagogical aims in the text. Already in the first sentence it is outlined that these areas are representing common values. The policymakers are appealing to a value system that is apparently shared by all Hungarians. As in the process of "naturalization" (Fairclough 1989), these values are presented as if they were of common-sense and inevitable.

The curriculum (2012, 10640) then goes on to point out that these development areas "incorporate traditional values together with the 21st century's new societal needs." There is no further explanation on what traditional values or new societal needs mean. One can only make assumptions by looking at the thirteen development areas.

In many instances texts seek to establish the legitimacy of their claims through reference to other texts. The chapter of the NCC introducing these development areas is a good example of interdiscursivity. Morality, national pride and patriotism are frequent themes in the public communication of the present Hungarian government. From outdoor banners advocating the role of the government in protecting its citizens against the EU, to Viktor Orbán PMs speeches on how Hungarian's are freedom fighters who will not follow the Western European track ("Orbán Describes Hungarians as Freedom Fighters" 2014) these texts interdiscursively strengthen the communicational goals of the government.

When it comes to the aims of media literacy education, the policy-makers enumerate the following goals: pupils should become responsible participants of a global mediated public, and for this they need to understand the language of new and traditional media. The train of thought goes as follows: through media literacy education pupils will understand the language of media, which is the key to participatory democracy, a value-based life and eventually to participation in the global mediated community.

If we only focus on this specific part, we could conclude that media literacy is strongly connected to citizen education or civics. Yet when examined closely, media literacy appears in the frame curriculum in the arts area.

Both in primary and secondary education media literacy appears as a cross-curricular topic in Visual Arts, and in lower secondary education it also appears in Mother Tongue, History and Media Studies. In upper-secondary level (years 9-12) media literacy is a separate subject and schools can opt to teach either drama or media studies in year 9, and in years 11 and 12 schools can "once again decide whether to devote two lessons

per week to teaching visual culture, drama or media studies as part of their art education" (Research on Existing Media Education Policies Country Overview – Hungary 2014, 7). Thus in upper-secondary level as well, media literacy classes are among the so-called arts formation subjects. This shows certain indecision in policymaking: is this subject connected to social studies or art studies?

On evaluating concepts and theories of media literacy education, Martens (2010, 6) notes that many scholars "view access and understanding of contemporary media as a vital aspect of citizenship in general." Globally there is also a growing interest in framing media literacy as an integral concept for citizenship education (see, for example, the UNESCO or the European Union definitions).
Uusitalo (2010, 69) explains that in the Finnish context, for instance, "media literacy has been designated as an essential civic competence and media education is hoped to produce active citizen-subjects who will uphold democracy through their actions."Hungarian policy-makers are obviously trying to follow this trend. Yet in the current state it seems that as a development area, media literacy is defined as a civic competency, while in actual practice it is regarded as an arts subject.

In Hungary, the somewhat curious situation can be explained by the initial media literacy activists' and lobbyists' interest and background. LászlóHartai is a film director and he was leading the team advocating in the '90s for the introduction of this subject. Since they could not lobby for introducing media as a separate education area, it was immersed into arts area. In an interview Hartai (2014) admitted,"it is nearly impossible to remove it from that area. There is no political or educational will. It's a difficult situation."

*The Lexico-Grammatical Level.*For the lexico-grammatical level analysis, I will focus on the separate media literacy optional subject which is taught in one lesson per week on upper secondary level. The same dilemma of where should media literacy stand comes up again when analyzing the detailed description of the subject. Even on a lexico-grammatical level, it is revealing to analyze the name of the subject: Culture of the Moving Image and Media Studies. The first part of the name of the subject definitely suggests a stronger film education influence.

As mentioned earlier, the interest towards civic competencies and societal problems in present-day can also explained by European Union regulations and an overall interest in child protection issues. This assumption is strengthened lexically in the text of the NCC (2012, 10807) by the introduction of these areas: "Developing critical media literacy in line with child protection, value-based pedagogy and European Union recommendations for developing media literacy—through the following elements […]"

The European discourse on responsible citizenship appears also intertextually when it is stated, "Those responsible citizens who are part of media democracy should (also) be media literate" (2012, 10807).

There are several elements listed as being important in developing media literacy: differentiation of the real and the virtual world; knowledge and protection of European and Hungarian audiovisual heritage; development of critical thinking; development of a conscious consumer attitude; conscious and creative participation in online communication; knowledge of data security, addiction and avoiding other dangers, learning ethical rules in creating content on social media, etc.

In terms of evaluation the majority of these elements evolve around the question of protection: protecting the child from not knowing what is real and what is virtual, protecting the national audiovisual heritage and so on. Consciousness also appears several times in the list, while being media literate is simultaneously connected to being a good citizen (knowledge of ethical norms) and a good consumer (developing a conscious consumer attitude).

The NCC also introduces specific developmental aims through four components: reading and analysis, learning, communication, and critical thinking. These components are constructed according to age groups and define in broad terms what pupils should know. What follows in the text is a very detailed list of expected knowledge in media literacy. It starts with development of vocabulary and reading skills through media texts in first grade and it ends with—among others—debating editorials about media for 9-12 graders.These aims are formulated in sentences that lack verbs, which makes the style very much impersonal, and leaves room for much interpretation.

And lastly in the NCC media literacy is taken up in two other distinct subjects too: ICT education and Physical education and sports. Topics usually connected to media literacy (such as a critical knowledge of traditional media and online media; or responsible behavior in the online world), appear in ICT education under the media informatics section. The policymakers here, as elsewhere around the globe, have difficulties in clearly demarcating the line between media literacy and ICT knowledge. This is just another evidence in the rather controversial debate on what media literacy actually incorporates (see for instance RobbGrieco 2014)

While the above comes as no surprise to the connoisseurs, the NCC might hold a surprise with adding media literacy to Physical education and sports' educational content on upper secondary level. It is listed among knowledge connected to "lifestyle principles and custom systems: diet, biorhythm, hygiene, media literacy and addictions." But the policy-makers do not expand upon these. One can only assume that discourses on public health were of influence when the term was added to this list.

Conclusion

The paper set out to present an in-depth analysis of the educational goals of media education listed in the national core curriculum in Hungary. The examination revealed several intriguing features. On one hand it is definitely a positive aspect that media literacy appears among the thirteen development areas. The fact that is proceeded by such development areas as ethics education or national consciousness, and it is succeeded only by teaching students how to learn, shows the current government's lack of interest in the subject.

On the other hand, media literacy is in a somewhat contested situation: from its definition and scopes one could assume that it is a subject connected to citizenship or social studies. But by its position in the curriculum and its name we can see that it is situated in the area of art studies. The roots of this subject in Hungary lie within aesthetics, but its branches are being decorated with current concerns: digital media, data security, child protection.

Media literacy specialists and activists need to make a decision on what path to choose for the future. As it is now it seems that there are (too) many directions outlined in the national core curriculum. Media literacy education seems to be an all-encompassing subject to educate moving image aficionados, good citizens, but good consumers as well.

In the current political situation, it would be utterly important for media literacy experts to lobby for a repositioning of the subject from art studies to civics education.Another important fight would be to have a standalone subject from the first grade up until graduation. In the current state there is no continuity in media literacy education. On primary and lower secondary level one can find a cross-curricular approach, while media literacy then turns into a standalone, but optional subject.

As a conclusion media literacy education can only retain its hard-won presence in the NCC by building a clear focus for this subject. In a country that struggles with powerful political influence on its media system, children, and adolescents need to be empowered to understand the potential risks of not having a free media. It would be a great loss if we would let media literacy education lose its relevance.

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