Novitas-ROYAL, Vol.: 1(1), pp.1-9. ISSN: 1307-4733

NOVITAS ROYAL
RESEARCH ON YOUTH AND LANGUAGE

MEDIA EDUCATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: NOT OUR JOB?

Marko MAGLIĆ*

Abstract: This study discusses educational media policy and related concepts in Germany, contrasting it with what in fact happens at school. After analyzing the concept of media literacy and its role in present society, the questions whether media education should form part of EFL lessons, and up to which extend EFL teachers could be expected to attribute a central role to the integration of media education in their classes will be focused. Data for this research come from questionnaires collected from students and teachers of English in German schools. After the presentation of the major findings, suggestions are made to improve the quality of media education in ELT classrooms.

Keywords: media literacy, educational media policy, media education, EFL in Germany

Özet: Bu çalışma eğitimsel medya politikasını ve Almanya'daki bununla bağlantılı kavramları Almanya'daki okullardaki mevcut durumla karşılaştırarak tartışmaktadır. Çalışmada, medya okuryazarlığı kavramı ve onun toplumsal rolü incelendikten sonra, medya eğitiminin İngiliz dili eğitimi ders programlarındaki yeri ve İngilizce öğretmenlerinin sınıflarında medya eğitimine verdikleri yer tartışılarak ele alınacaktır. Çalışmaya dayanak oluşturan veriler anket çalışmaları yoluyla Almanya'daki İngilizce öğrencileri ve öğretmenlerinden toplanmıştır. En önemli bulguların sunulmasından sonra, İngilizce sınıflarındaki medya eğitimini geliştirmek amacıyla somut öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: medya okuryazarlığı, eğitimsel medya politikası, medya eğitimi, Almanya, İngilizce

1. MEDIA EDUCATION: POLICY VS. REALITY

We have to accept that within a couple of years our society has experienced enormous alterations due to information technology and that new media play a decisive role in it. Being an *Information Society* in the *Information Age*, new media seem to have reached schools. Meanwhile the German government has made big efforts to integrate it into the educational system. Not only in secondary, but even in primary education media related skills are to be trained as required by Germany's regionally diverse curricula. For the teaching of English, as Kohn (2003) demonstrates, media utilization forms a decisive part in all of the German states. Confronted with the needs of information society, projects like *SelGO* (www.selgo.de) or *Lehrer Online Netz* (www.lo-net.de) have been initiated. Their success is relatively small, which could be led back to several circumstances: Solutions had to be available quickly and have thus been designed by policy makers in the form of top-down processes. The target groups – teachers and students – were only marginally integrated into the production phase. Usability had to give way to the interests of involved parties such as Microsoft, school book publishers and others. As a result long training times are a prerequisite for working with these platforms, when at the same time teachers in Germany are no longer allowed to participate in trainings during school time.

The high investments and achievements praised by the pedagogical establishment, politicians and press make us assume the following:

1. The necessary foundations for a successful media education at school are given.
2. German schools offer their students a solid and up-to-date media education.

* University of Cologne, GERMANY, marko@maglic.de

3. The blackboard has been partially replaced by electronic devices in the classroom.
4. When students leave school, technology-wise they are prepared for their later life, be it in academic or professional environments.

2. METHOD

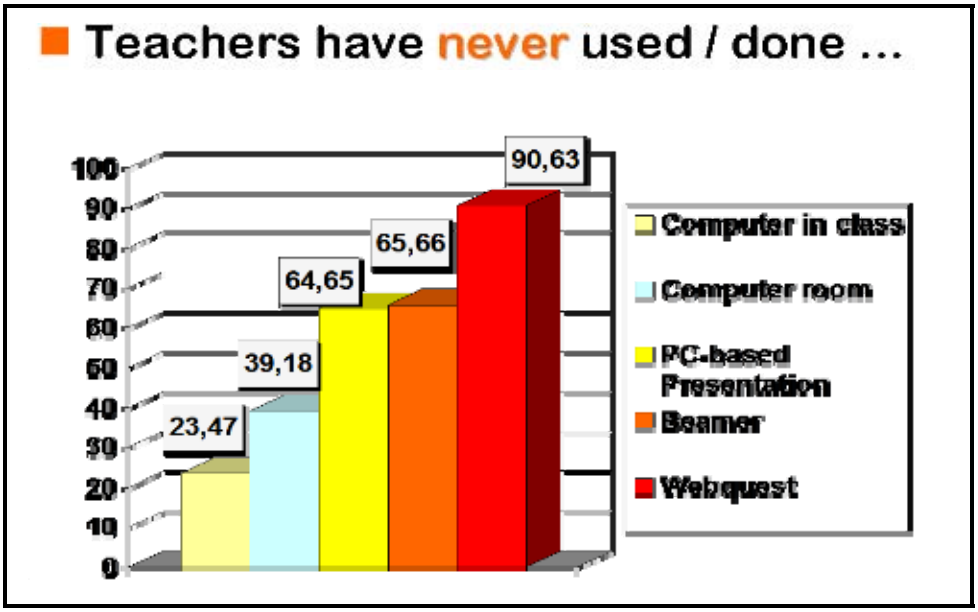
In order to shed light onto the place of new technologies and media literacy at a comprehensive school in Cologne, questionnaires were distributed to 115 students of year 11 and 102 teachers teaching at all grades. The school in which this research was carried out has around 2.000 students and approximately 210 teachers. In this present study, data were collected in March 2006. The technological prerequisites– four well equipped computer rooms, around 20 additional PCs in the library and four beamers for teachers.

3. FINDINGS

93% of the teachers and 95.57% of the students have been working with computers for more than three years. Further, 85% of the teachers and 70% of the students have email communication at least several times per week, and 98% of the teachers and 90% of the students can handle emails well on their own. Around 95% of both dispose of a PC and internet access at home. At home, more than 60% use the PC every day, around 30% several times per week. Though they spend most of the day at school, only 20% of the teachers and 8.5% of the students use the school PCs every day, respectively 30% and 3.7% several times per week.

Strikingly contrasting, active media use in the classroom seldom takes place: 23.47% of the teachers have never used a computer in class. Around 40% have never been to one of the computer rooms with their students, 65% have never done a PC-based presentation or used a digital projector. In addition, 90.63% of the teachers and 51% of the students have never worked with a web-quest. Teachers only marginally integrate the disposable technology in class.

Figure 1: Teachers' Media Utilization in Class (Maglić, 2006)



From the students' side the wish for more technology in the classroom is quite notable: 89% express clearly that they want teachers to *use PCs more often in the classroom*. While 99% of the teachers were of the opinion that the students will have disadvantages in their life without computer knowledge, only 77% of the students shared this opinion. In other words, almost a quarter of around 17-year-old students living in 2006's information society is not fully convinced that media literacy is a necessary skill for future success.

Reasons for the non-functioning of media integration in class are numerous, and can be identified easily as follows: No time for this 'nice-to-have', pupils don't want…, we have to get through with our subjects, I don't know how to handle, etc. Regarding our assumptions we can thus state:

1. Technological foundations for a successful media education at school are given. Cultural are still missing.
2. German schools are partially able to offer their students a basic media education.
3. The blackboard is still the dominating technical device in the classrooms.
4. When students leave school, technology-wise they are not yet prepared for using new media as a tool for academic or professional work.

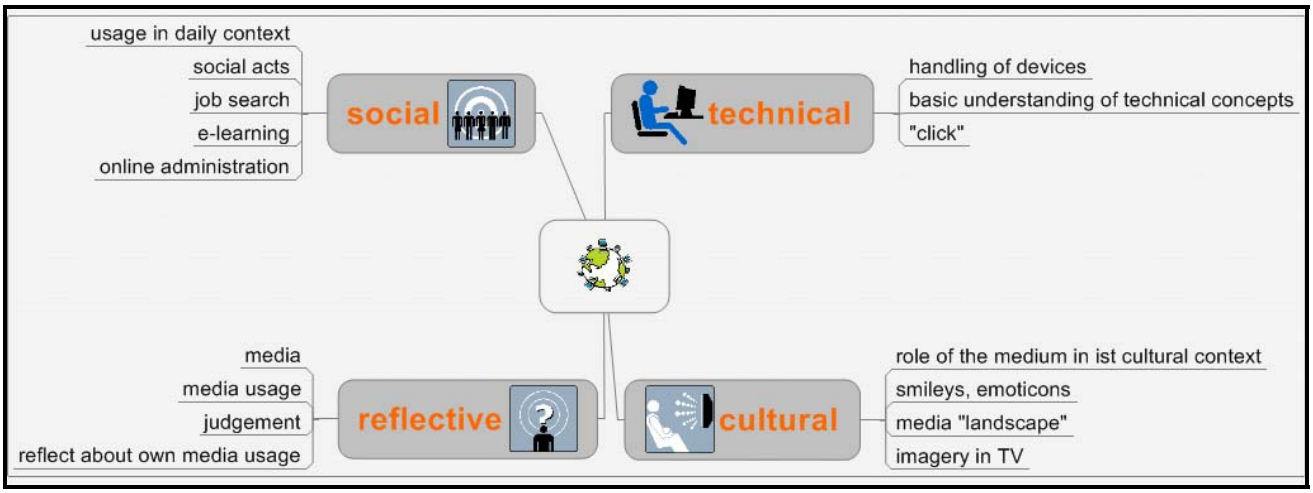
Given this, educational policy, financial investments and public discussions on media education are battered down by reality. What, according to the above observations remains of media education at school might be the use of the blackboard, the OHP, and maybe a film analysis from time to time. Though the government has established certain technological foundations, an education towards awareness of its application as *the* central 21st century skill apparently has not taken place. A step back has to be made by answering the question: Why should teachers and students work with media at school? An observation of media literacy and its impact on the individual and society might help to answer this question.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Media Literacy

Related to new media, media literacy is often reduced to the *ability to technically handle* the new technologies, when actually it comprises far more than what is commonly being acknowledged: It is *more than the ability to click with a mouse; it is a difficult extension of our* [general] *life competence* (von Hentig, 1999, p. 152), as the following overview illustrates:

Figure 2: Media Literacy. Cf. (Arnold & Pätzold, 2005, p. 67)



Technical (handling of technological devices), social (use of these devices for social participation), and cultural (media's role in society / in cultural contexts) competences in relation to media literacy are usually considered those to be learnt, while the reflective usage of media – including the knowledge about its role in a specific cultural context – are often disregarded. Economic or ecological media literacy are not even discussed in public, technology as a means of social control does not even exist in public, being reserved for some kind of 'conspiracy nuts' (Wilson & Hill, 1998, p. 14). Such neglect of publicly discussing technology's decisive and potentially negative impact on our daily life is not only irresponsible, but in fact, we prevent the younger generations from being able to actively participate in society, be it ours or the ones to come. This is the reason why North-Rhine-Westphalia's (NRW) Prime Minister Rüttgers avers in his invitation to *The Day of Media Literacy in NRW's parliament* (Rüttgers & van Dinther, 2006):

> Media seep through our daily lives. The autonomous handling of media has become a key qualification for our society, and for a lot already the fourth cultural skill – almost as important as reading, writing and arithmetic. Social and political participation in our information society can only be realized through media literacy.

4.2. Media Literacy And The 'Information' Society

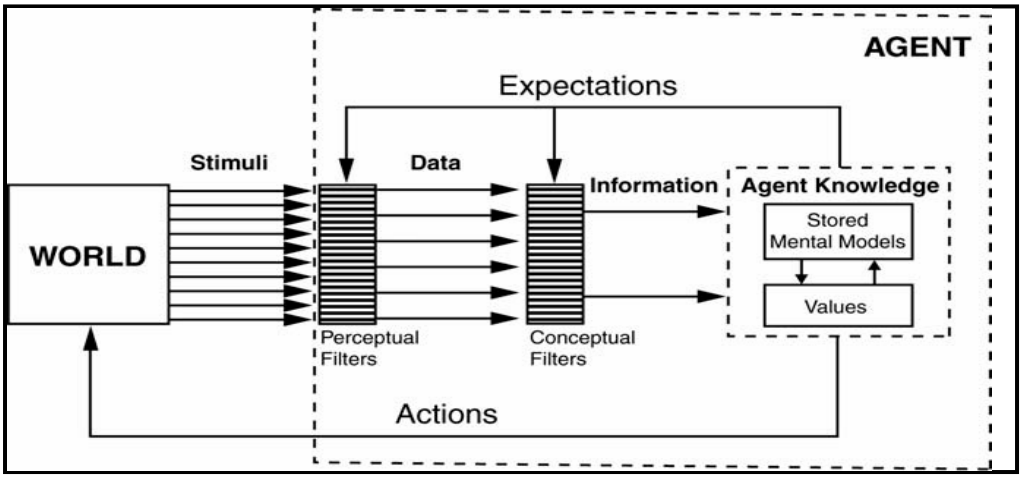
While the fact that new technologies have a strong impact on society and *somehow* shape it is generally acknowledged, their mutual dependence is only focused on occasionally. Lyon (2003, p. 163) points out that technological developments and social processes mutually influence, shape or co-construct, each other. It can also be deduced, following Phillips (1997, p. 248) that technical systems are essentially social, and social systems are essentially technical. In today's society, mobile communication is omnipresent and to be regarded as indispensable for anyone desiring to form part of this society. At the same time, the possibilities for man turned into challenges for him. The speed of communication, time and cost-savings, and ubiquitous ability of acting have become an imperative not only in business life but also in other realms. Availability everywhere and every time thus do not restrict themselves to every*thing*; every*body* must be

available almost anytime. In this environment, the position of man and the structure of society have been altered enormously. In Poster's words (1996, p. 25),

> Computer conversations, I contend, construct a new configuration of the process of self-constitution. The subject is changed in computer communications, dispersed in a post-modern semantic field of time/space, inner/outer, mind/matter. […] If computer writing substitutes for the printed word, computer communications substitutes for the postal system, the telephone, and more radically for face-to-face meetings. These forms of computer writing [emails, tele-conference …] appear to have definite effects on the subject since:
>
> 1) They introduce new possibilities for playing with identities,
> 2) They degender communications by removing gender cues,
> 3) They destabilize existing hierarchies in relationships and re-hierarchize communications according to criteria that were previously irrelevant, and above all
> 4) They disperse the subject, dislocating it temporally and spatially.

Media literacy is thus to be considered as a sine-qua-non for a successful self-constitution of the individual – especially for the personal development of the younger individuals, our students. The constant *bombing* with multi-medially presented 'information' makes the solid ability to individually process and reflect such 'information' more important than ever. If it has to be generated for personal development, we have to remember that it has to be actively created by the individual. Boisot and Canals (2004, p. 47) summarize that information is an extraction from data that, by modifying the relevant probability distributions, has a capacity to perform useful work on an agent's knowledge base. Hence knowledge is – in accordance with the constructivist/constructionist theory – an individual product of the *agent-in-the-world.* When/after receiving data through perceptual filters, the *agent* uses conceptual filters to identify and extract the information from this data, and then generates knowledge on the base of associations with already *stored mental models* and *values*:

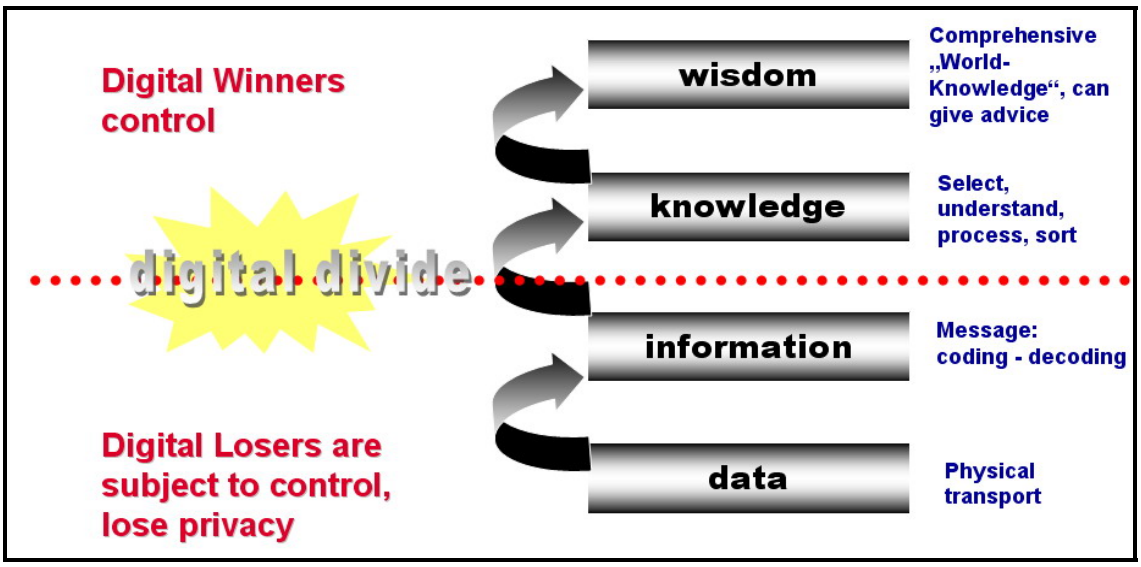
Figure 3: Agent in the World. (Boisot & Canals, 2004, p. 48).



As there are physical limits to our access to data and hence to our ability to reliably extract information from data (Boisot & Canals, 2004, p. 57), we cannot only conclude that due to

differing individual abilities the extracted information differs, but that as a consequence of the physical limitations of our perception the knowledge generation process itself is limited. Individual abilities in this competence have a strong impact on society as well, leading to what is known as the *Digital Divide*: The *digital winners*, disposing of the required abilities and having access to today's and tomorrow's technology, control the *digital losers*, lacking it:

Figure 4: Digital Divide (Maglić, 2006)



The only possibility for the individual to escape the danger of becoming controlled without even being aware of it is a solid understanding of how media and technology work. As media literacy – the ability of information processing and knowledge generation including the ability to escape the impact of mass media – is thus to be regarded as the key competence of the 21st century, so is the essential skill of our 'information' society, media education to be considered the social task of our age.

4.3. Media Education as an Educational Task in EFL Classes

Accepting that society has a social responsibility for media education, a very essential question emerges: who should do that, when, where, and how? Teachers partially do not consider media education as part of their job: Their job is to teach their subjects. At first sight, one could agree: a language teacher has to teach languages. Such argumentation would cut out central aspects of what schools' *job* might be: Besides training or learning, education in the sense of *Bildung* is – though still disputed – commonly regarded as a central educational goal and task of school. Relating the requirements of our information society with this assumption, Günther (2002) comes to the conclusion:

> School and education [*Bildung*] contradict each other today. The traditional system does no longer meet the new demands. Politically, education [*Bildung*] had to meet the demands of society. Only dictatorships and colonial powers are interested in uneducated [*ungebildet*] people. Democracies have to follow the latest findings and offer their citizens a state-of-the-art training [*Ausbildung*]. (p. 159).

Academic or professional life after school no longer requires the skills needed years ago. Today, English is no longer an asset, but a matter of course. Motivation, communication and representation skills are decisive factors, and media literacy is indispensable. In a time where emails have become the means of communication and retrieving information in databases or calculating prices on-the-fly have replaced searching through printed catalogues, typing fast is an essential basic skill. The dimensions of speed and quantity have not only been added to the communication process, they even changed it. The speed of communication has lead to a stronger focus on the communicative function of language. When earlier it might have been important not to forget the addition of 's' to 3rd person singular verb or to avoid typing errors, nowadays adequateness and correctness of the message, not of the language reflecting a focus on meaning rather than on form.

New media are no longer something exotic far away from the educational sector. They have to be understood as a social tool we are faced with every single day. To train it in dedicated ICT-courses is a reduction that by no means can be sufficient. If we want to offer our students a state-of-the-art education, media literacy in all its facets has to be integrated into all subjects, as well into EFL classes. In spite of the already mentioned 'arguments' against media integration, there are quite a number of opportunities for implementing media such as:

- Working with web quests gives the teacher time to breathe and coach the students.
- Training in online information retrieval and subsequent student presentations trains central skills.
- Students elaborate lasting electronic portfolios instead of paper portfolios or posters which disappear after short time.
- The use of digital projectors instead of the dusty blackboard offers more readability and the chance to provide the students with the 'board notes'.
- Tons of paper is copied for the paper bin; why not offer our students optional download material?
- RSS-feeds and magazine newsletters offer a cost-free access to latest news. Students could be obliged to present an article in class.
- *Podcasts* enable us to meet the iPod-generation where it is, where it currently stands.

What we have to bear in mind is that thoughtful media integration does neither hinder nor impede language learning – it helps to experience it. Thus a media-based language acquisition process is in fact a real learning process leading to knowledge generation. At the same time experiencing the language fosters an active use of the technological devices so indispensable for active participation in our society.

5. CONCLUSION: WHOSE JOB IS IT?

Coming back to the question *who should do that, when, where, and how?* We could synthesize the following agents and tasks.

5.1. Policy Makers

- should not forget about the different facets of media literacy, and make sure that these are all trained at school.

- should pay more attention to the target groups: awareness on the teachers' as well as on the students' side has to be generated in order to motivate for the constant utilization of new media. Apart from the technological foundations, cultural awareness and opportunities for teacher training are decisive.

5.2. Teachers

- should take risk in class. What has been suitable for decades is not suitable now, and the demands change faster than ever.
- should accept the central role of media literacy and overcome the many obstacles through their own initiative.
- should be a model for the students and thus motivate them continuously for using new media as a tool for work.

5.3. Students

- should, if they want to actively participate in an information society, accept that there is no way around using the tools they handle so well for their entertainment as well for 'work'.
- should demand media integration from their teachers.

Even if we cannot state that media education is the job of an EFL or any other teacher, we have to acknowledge that teachers are the driving force for successful media education in class: In spite of the many programs, initiatives or discussions, it is the teachers' job to educate, not only to train students. Abundant obstacles cannot serve as an excuse for avoiding media integration: Where governmental programs and students' motivation are not given adequately, the teacher's role becomes even more important. We have to provide the means to create knowledge from information if we want our society to develop positively, but that we all – and especially teachers – do have the responsibility to enable students to actively participate in society and to prepare them for the future. The students' right is a responsible teacher's obligation, be it in whatever subject.

REFERENCES

Arnold, R., & Pätzold, H. (2005). *Schulpädagogik kompakt: Prüfungswissen auf den Punkt gebracht.* Studium kompakt. Berlin: Cornelsen Scriptor.

Boisot, M. H., & Canals, A. (2004). Data, information and knowledge: Have we got it right? *JEE, 14*,43–67.

Günther, J. (2002). *Die neue Mobilität der Gesellschaft.* Innsbruck: Studien-Verl.

Hentig, H. von. (1999). *Ach, die Werte!: Ein öffentliches Bewußtsein von zwiespältigen Aufgaben; über eine Erziehung für das 21. Jahrhundert.* München: Hanser.

Kohn, M. (2003). *Leitfaden moderne Medien: PC-Einsatz im Englischunterricht.* Unterrichts-Perspektiven Fremdsprachen. Hannover: Schroedel.

Lyon, D. (2003). Surveillance technology and surveillance society. In T. J. Misa, P. Brey, & A. Feenberg (Eds.), *Modernity and technology. Workshop Proceedings. University. of Twente in the Netherlands, November, 1999* (pp. 161–183). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Maglić, M. (2006). *Computer & Co. an der Integrierten Gesamtschule Holweide.: Beobachtungen und Handlungsempfehlungen zu Mediennutzung und Medienkompetenz.* 2. Staatsexamensarbeit, Landesprüfungsamt Nordrheinwestfalen. Dortmund.

Phillips, D. J. (1997). Cryptography, secrets, and the structuring of trust. In P. Agre, & M.

Rotenberg (Eds.). *Technology and privacy. The new landscape* (pp. 243–276). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Poster, M. (1996). *The mode of information: Poststructuralism and social context.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Rüttgers, J., & van Dinther, R. (2006). *Grußwort: Der Tag der Medienkompetenz im Landtag NRW.* NRW, Germany: Landtag. Retrieved March 12, 2007, from www.tagdermedienkompetenz.de

Wilson, R. Anton, & Hill, M. Joan. (1998). *Everything is under control: Conspiracies, cults, and cover-ups.* New York: Harper Perennial.

* The findings of this study have been presented in The British Council Berlin Conference (2007): *Preparing for the World of Work-Language Education for the Future*, which was held in Germany.