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Media Literacy, Education & (Civic) Capability: A Transferable Methodology

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between a formal media educational encounter in the UK and the broad objectives for media and information literacy education circulating in mainland Europe and the US. A pilot study, developed with a special interest group of the United Kingdom Literacy Association, applied a three-part methodology for comparing the media literacy levels of young people who have studied media in school against peers who at the same educational level, who have not engaged with media education of any kind. The approach hones in on Mihailidis' (2014) framework for media literacy and civic engagement.

Keywords: *media literacy, media studies, civic engagement*

This exploratory pilot study seeks to address the connections (if any) between media literacy education and meaningful civic engagement. Previous research in this field (McDougall 2014; Livingstone et al. 2014) indicates that the composite model for media and information literacy (MIL) circulating internationally is too ambitious in converging critical, creative, and civic media literacy. A new methodology, then, has been developed for this study, which explicitly 'hones in' on Mihailidis' (2014) more applicable '5 As' framework. We have separated these elements in order to measure the extent to which GCSE Media Studies in England (a mainstream school subject, examined at 16 years of age) can foster each. First, an online survey captured the variety of participants' media consumption and engagement (Access, Appreciation), measuring use of media and creation/adaptation of media. Students then took part in the second-stage, which comprised of an observed and recorded textual analysis activity, which was followed by semi-structured interviews, building on themes from the initial survey (Awareness, Assessment). Finally, the young people were required to complete a creative task with a civic engagement objective and to upload their work online, reach an audience, and begin to create momentum and engagement around the civic issue raised (Action). This three-stage methodology, we suggest here, can be applied to any context, in any country, where young people have completed a course or engaged in a project with clear media literacy/education objectives—with the longer term objective to identify best practice in media education "mapped" to the criteria for "Action." We are mindful of Banaji and Buckingham's (2013) research findings—that young people's civic engagement is intermittent and contextual—and so measuring this in an exploratory pilot study risks ignoring such complexity in the quest for evidence. However, we were keen to bring an exploration of the extent to which formal, institutionalized media education includes a civic dimension of any kind, beyond the implication and assumption that critical thinking about media and/or making

and sharing media across networks is the same as, or even related to, joining the conversation in the public sphere, digital or otherwise.

In Europe and the UK in particular, the “fault-lines” between literacy, new literacies, time and space based literacies, media literacy, digital literacy, transliteracies, and broader “safeguarding” objectives have “always-already” been the subject of research, dispute and compromised practice, as has the educational “response” to popular/ “mass” culture and, more recently, digital and social media. Frau-Meigs (2012, 22) argues for transliteracy as a conduit for “new collective dynamics,” whilst in the issue of the UKLA’s journal, Comber (2014, 116) reflects on decades of her own research with the disclaimer “the impact of literacy wars and bandwagons has for too long distracted educators from the main game...that people understand how to use texts appropriately to get things done, how to make meaning and how to question the views of the world represented in texts in the interests of particular groups” (ibid., 116). Meanwhile, Burn (2013) calls for a shift in focus to “media arts” in order to convert STEM to STEAM, with reciprocal transfer between the “critical rhetorics” of media education and the creativity and aesthetics of the arts in order to respond to new forms of screen art such as videogames. Going further, the European and US ‘interventions’ in the field we inhabit here have generally lacked capacity for exploring the more complex configurations of literacy, such as funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al. 2005); repertoires (Marsh 2009); permeability/porosity (McDougall and Potter 2015); teacher/student boundary work (Shwartz 2014); semiotic modes (Parry 2014); cultural agency (Daniels 2014) and “artifactual” literacy ethnographies (Jones 2014, Pahl, and Roswell 2010).

According to EU’s Report on Formal Media Education in Europe (Hartai 2014, 16) the concept of media literacy is nowadays predominantly defined in policy, pedagogic, research, and public discourse as the ability to “[1] access the media, [2] understand and to critically approach different aspects of media contents and institutions, and [3] to create communication in a variety of contexts.” This approach to media literacy, firstly introduced in The Aspen Institute Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy (Aufderheide 1992), describes media literacy partly as the ability to use and understand media, as a mean of self-protection and safe media choices, and partly as the ability to create (all) media, leaning towards the idea of self-empowerment, self-expression, and active citizenship with informed, moral, and legal choices. Since Article 19 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1989) states that everyone has the right and freedom “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers,” the UN holds that MIL is “essential to empower citizenries all around the world to have the full benefits of this fundamental right” (UNESCO 2011, 4).

Asserting media literacy as a human right, a “matter of inclusion and citizenship in today’s information society” (European Commission 2011a, 1), has brought UN’s and EU’s attention to a need for strategic media education in compulsory schooling. EMEDUS project (2012-2014) argues that “Access, Analysis, Evaluation and Creative Production as modern, activity-orientated pedagogical and methodological terms cannot provide a [media education] framework, but they are beginning to function as a quasi-framework with their strong emphases and with the specific areas, which are especially important for European media politics” (Hartai 2014, 18). Drawing upon national curricula, the study concluded that “there seems to be some form of media education in 70% of the member states at primary level, in 75% at lower-secondary level and in 80% at upper-secondary level” (ibid., 58).

EMEDUS recommends developing a method especially designed for measuring media literacy skills and knowledge across the EU, adding that “it would also be advantageous if this method and the results of the tests could be compared to the examination types that are currently used to assess media literacy—if only in a very few countries [and] to the results of Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy Levels in Europe” (Hartai 2014, 113, 140).

As we have argued elsewhere (McDougall et al. 2014), the “composite model” of media and information literacy adopted across Europe, manifested in research and reports from COST/ANR, EMEDUS, Ofcom in the UK and in the recent Unesco declaration is laudable in conviction but in urgent need of “untangling” both from its muddled over-ambition and regulatory/pedagogical contradictions. The very broad and far reaching remit for

media literacy as a panacea is untenable for educators to achieve. In the over-arching rationale for their international collection on media literacy education, De Abreu and Mihailidis (2013) cite Rheingold (2011) for the immense responsibility for media literacy education to foster criticality, participation, engagement, vibrancy, inclusion, tolerance, and even mindfulness.

The danger of this scale of ambition, we suggest, is that media literacy educators re-render the project always incomplete (to paraphrase Habermas). For instance, EMEDUS study praises the Czech Framework Education Program (VUP 2004, 2007) for its complex account of cross-curricular media education including “actual knowledge content or topics to be covered,” sufficiently aiding “teachers in creating their lesson plans” (Hartain 2014, 142). However, a qualitative study conducted in Czech primary classrooms discovered that the majority of teachers found its scope intimidating and difficult to approach (Zezulkova 2015). Topics such as “copyright issues” or “participatory democracy and active citizenship” included in the Framework made participating teachers believe that media education was only suitable for the older learners.

In this research, we are keen to explore the kinds of more modest pedagogic shifts that could deliver empirical evidence of media education facilitating the different strands of media literacy. We propose a separation of, and then an incremental progression between, the three threads of media literacy that are consistently foregrounded in international policy and practice—critical reading, creative production, and civic action.

Context: GCSE Media Studies

Media literacy and media education are not the same, and the status of Media Studies in relation to media literacy in the UK is complex (see Wallis 2014). This study is the first to attempt a coherent mapping of the two in relation to secondary education. GCSE is a national qualification studied in compulsory secondary education and assessed at sixteen years old in England. The outcomes determine progression to further education. The assessment objectives for GCSE in Media Studies are:

- Knowledge and understanding of media products and the contexts in which they are produced and consumed
- Analyse and respond to media texts/topics using media key concepts and appropriate terminology
- Demonstrate research, planning, and presentation skills
- Construct and evaluate their own products using creative and technical skills

Methodology

The three-stage methodology at work here, we suggest, can be applied to any context, in any country, where young people have completed a course or engaged in a project with clear media literacy/education objectives, with the longer term objective to identify best practice in media education “mapped” to the criteria for “Action.” See Figure 1 for overview. It is important to concede that, as with any educational research, the extent to which media education “intervention” merely enhances existing engagement is difficult to measure. Particularly for the first of our criteria—informed engagement with media in everyday life, a “chicken and egg” dilemma is presented—do young people who are already media-engaged choose the subject or does the subject foster such activity? The same is true of online political “civics”—the young people at work in this sphere tend to be already engaged offline (Banaji and Buckingham 2013, 155).

Six pairs of sixteen to seventeen year olds in further education were recruited, two pairs in each of three locations (London, West England, and Midlands)—one pair already having an A or B grade in Media Studies and the other pair never having studied media in school. Importantly, the non-media group was at the same educational level (studying for A Levels) as the group with the media qualification.

<i>EU/Unesco/Ofcom</i>	<i>Paul Mihailidis</i>	<i>Method</i>
Informed use, creative making, safe sharing	ACCESS	Survey Profiling
Critical reading	AWARENESS, ASSESSMENT, APPRECIATION	Fieldwork (analysis, interviews)
Civic engagement	ACTION	Online creative (political) task

Figure 1: Three-stage Media Literacy Research Methodology

Each pair of participants took part in three activities: (1) an online profiling exercise to map media engagements to the composite international model of media/digital/information literacy evidence criteria, (2) oral response to a sequence from the documentary film, *Super Size Me!*, followed by interviews to elicit discursive elaboration/context; and (3) an individual student-produced online creative social media task.

Access and Appreciation

We designed an online survey to elicit information from students about consumption, production, engagement, and participation, which could be followed up in the interviews. An initial analysis was undertaken to look for any significant differences in responses between the two sets of participants and in relation to gender as 75% of the students were female. However, given the limited scope of this pilot study, the voluntary/teacher facilitated nature of participation and the limited further socio-cultural data available about the sample, no other demographic factors were considered.

We developed questions about students' social media participation and their experiences of commenting in online contexts to explore potential differences between the Media Studies students and the other students. Use of Vine was very limited, but almost all students used Snapchat. Only one student (female, non-media) reported putting audio work online. Very few students reported giving feedback on purchases online and there were no differences in the proportions posting comments on Facebook or photosites either by gender or previous study of the media. Only two students (both female, non-media) reported commenting on news sites and only one participated in an online forum and two on a campaign site. No students took part in offline campaigning, though one who was active in campaigning online did say at interview that she had wanted to attend a demonstration but was not allowed by parents.

We also asked students to describe any experiences they may have had of consciously deciding to stop using particular media. This prompt produced diverse responses from eight of the twelve students, which might be put into three main categories. Some students explained a loss of interest or of the media use getting in the way of other tasks. For example, students noted:

“Instagram, Facebook, Twitter because I found it was a distraction.”

“Yes, I decided to deactivate my Facebook because I was hardly using it and saw no use of it.”

"Stopping using Twitter because I didn't find it interesting."
"I stopped using Snapchat because it was boring."

Some students explained a loss or interest in media use due to ideological reasons:

"I stopped buying magazines (for example Look) because of the manipulated content."

"I stopped reading Daily Mail because it became apparent that they're racist, sexist and everything that journalists shouldn't be. My Maths teacher also influenced me to read The Times/Metro as an alternative. I stopped watching TV Soap, e.g. Eastenders, Hollyoaks because they're absolutely rubbish and completely irrelevant to my personal interests."

Still other students explained a loss or interest due to concerns about privacy/safeguarding:

"I stopped using Snapchat as I kept on having guys send nudes—which I didn't appreciate. Also, I've deactivated my Facebook account several times due to foreign people adding me."

These comments cut across media and non-media students, though ideological and privacy rationales were only given by females. However, the earlier questions on levels of participation did yield some clear differences between the two groups. Those who had studied media were more likely to be active users of Twitter, Facebook and online photo sites such as Instagram, as well as more likely to comment via Twitter. Only three students ever post videos online, all of whom were female media students. Females were much more likely to have their own blog or Tumblr and only females reported putting artwork or stories online. As suggested above, however, this was only a pilot study, with a very small sample, so no wider conclusions could be drawn from it.

Awareness and Assessment

Participants were interviewed about a video clip from the documentary film *Super Size Me!* (Spurlock 2004), which chronicles the filmmaker's decision to eat only McDonalds fast food for 30 days. Students were also asked a series of questions about their media use more widely, building on emerging themes from data generated by the online survey. We took a comparative approach to the qualitative data, and looked for the "methods of agreement" and "methods of disagreement," which existed—with Mihailidis' "5As" acting as our categories. The international criteria for MIL generally begin with access and informed use of digital media as a starting point. The recent UNESCO declaration (2014, 7) cites "using information, media and digital technology for individual and societal purpose, including for self-expression, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, equality, and the right and the ability to make own decisions, enjoying media for leisure and learning/ working with media. Likewise, Mihailidis (2014) is clear that a civic society cannot exist without access to information. He argues that ownership is essential, participation is fundamental, and any barriers to this must be identified. Living in the UK and all attending post-16 education, all of our participants had a wide access to an array of communication tools and platforms.

Aside from one student who read *The Times*, all stated that they got their news from online sources, with the BBC's news app being the most popular platform. Even those studying media subjects did not regularly read a newspaper, as in the student who said:

"I stopped doing that [reading newspapers] a long time ago. "

All had a clear awareness of how and where to access news and information—a key component of Mihailidis' conception of a global citizen. However, we found no evidence of the Media Studies students either having any

advantage or keener interest in accessing news and current affairs. In most cases where news awareness was evident, this was either linked to college work or “pushed” to students through social media or online alerts. For example, students said:

“[Only] if someone re-tweets it.”

“I only ever look at news articles if I’m researching some work I’m supposed to be doing. I rarely look at things like that—maybe on Google every now-and-then if it comes up in my feed, then I’ll have a look.”

“Er...well obviously some [news stories] come through on social media, like Facebook.”

The “critical understanding” strand of MIL includes awareness of ownership and agenda but also critical literacy at the level of the text. For Mihailidis (2014), awareness is the contextual foundation for access. His definition presupposes active inquiry and exploring the context.

In widening out the conversation more widely in the interviews to take in documentaries more broadly, the students who had not studied the media still showed awareness of the form:

“The ‘educating’ shows. They are worth watching because I think they are real to what we are doing now.”

“With Educating Yorkshire (Channel 4), it’s quite neutral, quite true, good things happening but also fights and stuff. So it doesn’t try to make you believe it’s a good school; it’s just the reality.”

Perhaps because of the lack of facilitated analysis, students who had not studied it often talked about the media as a threat. Consider these samples from the interviews:

“It’s really hard to escape media, cos it’s everywhere, on the wall, radio, even music sometimes can influence you. Some people base their lives on what they’ve heard from TV, or what a model is dressed like in a magazine.”

“The lower class...can be represented negatively. There’s been loads of stuff like Benefits Street (Channel 4) and how they’re all scrounging and taking our money.”

“So, I bought the newspaper in and [the teacher] just took it out of my hand and put it in the bin. I was really confused and she told me to look it up, the debate that centers around the issues with The Daily Mail, and I looked it up, and...all sorts of articles that they printed in the past, which is different ways are racist and sexist...they are very unreliable...anything journalists shouldn’t be...they are!”

“Because [the audience] associate things they’ve seen in the documentary, with the real thing. I mean if they saw a documentary about a sweatshop, the, when they bought clothes from...I dunno...Primark, in the back of the head, they would be seeing images from the documentary and it would put them off.”

The students who had studied media, on the other hand, were far less concerned about media's negative impact and expressed the benefits of studying media at school or college. Students explained:

“I’m always analyzing anything that happens in a movie.”

“Before studying the media I wouldn’t really think anything of anything I watched or that came up on TV, but then after studying [media] for a year and a bit I started thinking about camera shots used, angles, purpose of things...so it makes me think of a lot of things from a media perspective.”

“We’ve asked the teacher if we can, like, look at celebrities and stuff, and find out why people want to be like them.”

For this part of the fieldwork, we showed the pairs of students a sequence from *Super Size Me!* which features significant ellipsis, point of view and the required acceptance of the “reality” of the material on the part of the audience.¹ While we are pleased to report that all of our participants demonstrated a proficiency in critical response, those with a media qualification used a different, more specialist vocabulary. Non-media students explained the clip with comments like these:

“It jumped.”

“It’s quite biased.”

“Quite casual. Literally just a guy in a camera in a car.”

“Er...um...I did notice that...it...was all done live, and then edited in the moment, what was happening.”

“Well, it was quite good when they did the blackouts with the ‘fifteen minutes.’”

Whereas the media students used a more academic/technical discourse:

“A lot of it was diegetic...I like knowing about the diegetic and non-diegetic and knowing the effects they have.”

“It was all hand-held...it showed what it would be like to be in the car with him, with shake-y camera, for, like, realism. And then a tilt-down out of the window.”

“It’s just spacing out the time, cos they’re not going to show all 23-minutes of it. So, it’s a lot easier to use editing to show the, kind of, time passing by rather than filming the whole, entire amount of time that he spent eating.”

“[On Planet Earth, BBC) It’s just wide-shots over a long period of time of a certain area of land, basically which non-one is going to go to in their life...to show them that’s there...but considering it’s shot in a specific way, people can’t relate to it, like, ‘oh yeah, I was there,’ where with [Super Size Me), the camera technique it shows, it’s amateur in a way.”

“I thought it worked quite well, cos we didn’t have to watch, cos, at one point it said ‘five minutes later, we didn’t have to watch five-minutes of him eating. It was, like, and-and-quick, and, like, you got the main points.”

¹ The clip is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATYJx3x0nyo>.

Appreciation, for Mihailidis, promotes the development of a civic society. Media literacy must cultivate critical thinking skills and a mindful disposition to media voices and diversity. All of the students, across the two groups, demonstrated sensitivity to diverse perspectives concerning representation:

“There are things like ‘Page 3’ [The Sun’s daily topless female model] which just shouldn’t be there.”

“Like the Ferguson thing [US city where a shooting of an African-American by a police officer took place in August, 2014], my dash was like full of stuff, and I don’t follow things like that, but the main one is feminism and body image as the moment...The whole thing with more people becoming aware of transgender and sexuality, and I’m more aware now because of it.”

“I was watching this Oscar awarding-winning documentary...it’s called Tahrir Square—it’s called Square actually in Arabic—and the whole concept is the Egyptian revolution and the presenter himself is a revolutionary.”

“I remember for ages when I was younger, I wanted my own fashion magazine, and then as soon as I did Media Studies, we did a content analysis of magazines, and I was, like, this is so false and everything is obviously put in there with all the models and it completely put me off. Kind of gender and the over-exaggeration of all the celebrity stuff, looking at all these stick-thin models. It put me off, but I’m glad it did.”

The informal hypothesis at work in our research, informed by our previously published critique of the bold ambition of MIL strategies, was that it would be much harder to find evidence of media education leading to civic engagement. This is beyond creating media for an audience and/or participation in online media communities. Mihailidis proposes a new mode of production for activism: “Media literacy has often assumed, with little evidence, that enhanced critical thinking will lead to civic awareness and engaged participation in civil society” (2014, 139). Previous EU funded research in the UK explored the potential of media literacy in the form of ethnographic documentary making as a pedagogic tool to foster civic engagement, with mixed results due to the variability of pedagogic rationale (see McDougall 2013). However, in terms of creating media—“untangled” from civic agency, the participants in our study who had not enrolled in Media Studies were least likely to participate at the more basic level:

“I have never shared a link, commented, or told anyone what to look at.”

“I just ‘like’ or ‘favorite’ stuff, but that’s it...I wouldn’t say I was a fan of anything. I like particular music and stuff, but I don’t, like, try to get involved.”

“My media use is probably basic minimum.”

“I used to tweet quite a bit, but now much now.”

“I have Facebook, although I don’t...I don’t like to spend a lot of time on it...but I have the app on my phone. So, if I’m bored. I might scroll down my newsfeed or something like that.”

By contrast, Media Studies students were more active users of videos and social media:

“I make videos, but I don’t always put them up...but when I do, it’s only for people I know and follow.”

“I’m kind of widely active in the whole, like, fan-stuff, cos I have two twitters; one’s for TV shows and one’s for bands and I just, like, reblog gifs and stuff. And the same with Tumblr...I make fan videos on YouTube...they take while to edit, but I probably put equal time into making them and watching them.”

“I’m in love with apps! Like, I love going on a lot of things, like I use Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, there’s Whatsapp that I use a lot cos it’s a constant messaging kind of thing, there’s Tumblr, like there’s a lot of things I use daily...I have 950 followers on Tumblr.”

“I watch quite a lot of YouTube. I’d say, it’s more like games...gaming videos and like...yeah, game videos.”

So, albeit at “entry level,” the students who had studied media were more likely to have a twitter account, a YouTube channel, a blog and be involved in creating media more generally—they experienced less “barriers to engagement” in Jenkins’ (2006) terms. However, we found no evidence that they are more likely to be involved in the types of civic action through media which Mihailidis describes. At the heart of the issue, then, is a gap between participation in online media and civic action, which may be assumed to be the same by media educators, or at least more related than appears to be the case on the basis of our findings. Indeed, the following statements are from the “non media” participants:

“I do some charity work, once a week...I did Challenge UK and with that we had to campaign to get people to give more blood...the internet was a big factor because we couldn’t have met up otherwise...so it was a massive component.”

“I think I might have mentioned the Gaza Palestinian sort of conflict going around, and there’s not much you can do when you’re a kid, and like, sixteen, and you’ve got this massive 60-year war going on, but the least you can do is, sort of, I don’t know, get your voice across, and I really did want to go to the protest that I think was in Trafalgar Square, but I wasn’t allowed to, so I signed petitions instead, and e-letters. It’s not like radical sort of stuff where you, say, condemn Israel, just the humanitarian, cos I’m a humanitarian I don’t really care about the political side.”

Creative Task: Action

Following the interview session, participants were asked to undertake a creative task, which involved making something with an explicit agenda of civic participation, putting it online and attempting to engage an audience. They were shown some short extracts from a range of “issue based” videos by other young people, most of which had featured in the Channel 4 TV/online project *Battlefront*, involving campaigning by youth. The videos they were shown ranged from simple webcam pieces to vox pops and more sophisticated edited videos. They were told that their work did not have to use video as a format; and that if they wished to use a “private” online space such as Facebook, they could send us screengrabs of audience responses, rather than giving us full access. They were given three weeks from the date of the interview and were incentivized to complete the process.

Ten of our twelve interviewees engaged in the production process. The majority used video, one an audio piece and one wrote a short blog post. The blog writer was the only participant to gain feedback. Topics

included the death penalty, the global water crisis, the cost of public transport for youth, feminism, teen female body image (twice), or the need for politics to be taught in schools and football (twice).

One participant already had her own Tumblr but opted to set up a Blogspot in order to share her short written post on the death penalty. Her feedback amounted to responses from three friends via Whatsapp. There was no visual content, no links to other sites or any attempt to move beyond a traditional “mini-essay” style format. Similarly, a very brief podcast on the cost of public transport provided little evidence of multimodal creativity, with the audio content comprising a complaint about older people having it easier than the young with their free bus passes. The author largely relied upon her own experience of having to get a lift from her parents or pay £4 for the bus rather than walk a mile. It was not placed online nor did it generate any audience response. The one non-media student to make a video claimed that she did not have the facility to upload it to the web: “I have no hosting sites to add my video onto as I do not have internet access on my laptop at home, I have took a video from my phone of the video I made on movie maker on my laptop so I could attach it here for you.” Her video about the water crisis comprised stills, captions and music, and was reminiscent of charity appeals.

The female media students all adopted more sophisticated approaches in terms of their resources, demonstrating greater facility with the technology and a clearer sense of audience. The majority involved other people in their videos as actors or interviewees. A “Politics in School” piece began and ended with a piece to camera about the creator’s own experience, framing a series of vox pops with fellow students which served to demonstrate their own ignorance of politics. Each vox pop concluded with a freeze frame, which seemed to offer the audience pause for thought each time. At the time of writing, the video had 60 views, but no responses. Another video, “The Tyranny of Slenderness” largely comprises shots of fashion and makeup in shops with voiceovers from different girls about their response to the body image expected of women. It features a range of shots from close up to wide, tracking shots, edits and some stylish titles designed to reflect the theme. This piece clearly speaks to its audience and adopts a style of documentary where the pictures are reinforced by the commentary. Another student production, entitled, “Perfect,” features at least half a dozen different teenage girls, each moving to sit down in a chair facing the camera with a range of slogans handwritten on paper, in the style of the much parodied *Another Students* created “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” a film trailer, which refer to aspects of teen body image (legs, nose, spots, etc). They proceed to tear up the slogans, often smiling and laughing to camera. There is no voiceover, but a powerful soundtrack anchors the action. Techniques such as dissolves, desaturation and slow motion are used, reminiscent of music video editing. This outcome has a clear structure and a mastery of media techniques in order to get its message across. This participant did show that she had shared the link on her Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr accounts; though, again, there was no evidence of any audience engagement.

One media student chose to produce a single shot piece, speaking directly to the camera, but she too adopted technical strategies such as a title sequence at start and end with her dancing into the camera and a large title appearing on screen along with some brash music. She followed a performance style, describing the video as her first vlog and directly addressing the camera throughout to make her case.

The two male students who completed the task had both studied media, both focused on football and both chose to include an older male (probably their father in each case; this hasn’t been confirmed) in either the production (off-screen interviewer) or on camera. One video presented the student’s views on refereeing and his experience as a referee and the other lobbied for cheaper ticket prices in the English Premier League. Both were dominated by a single shot and neither present clear evidence of having studied media.

So overall, what can we conclude? Firstly, incentivized for such a task but with no assessment attached, male participants were more reluctant to engage. Second, that females who had experience of media learning were technically much more confident, made use of media conventions, and had a clear sense of speaking to an audience. Third, that none made any attempt to engage an audience online beyond a small circle of friends either due to reluctance or inability, with only one of the non-media students even succeeding in getting anything online at all.

Findings and Conclusions

Our pilot study had two aims — to map international MIL criteria to GCSE Media Studies in England, using Mihailidis’ framework; and to produce a transferable methodology for such a mapping of MIL to media education in any context.

Again, we must proceed with caution—to be measured in our desire for youth to fulfill our wishes for civic energy, to be mindful of “the risk of constructing ideals that have never and will never correspond to the realities of most people’s lives” (Banaji and Buckingham 2013, 163). In Mihailidis’ terms, such “action” would need to be rooted not only in a desire to be part of the dialogue and a facility with techniques, but also in an agile pedagogic rationale about how to go about reaching an audience.

Those important disclaimers and caveats notwithstanding, we draw some recommendations from our research. While we are pleased to report that the students with a media qualification were able to produce material that was more coherent technically and—in mode of address—more literate perhaps ironically the “lifeworld” public-private literacies were, on this evidence, the least developed.

From our “local” mapping, we found that students who enrolled in Media Studies were more positive about its plurality and potential empowerment than those who haven’t, the latter articulating more suspicion and anxiety about media but were no less news aware. Those with a media qualification appear more comfortable in digital spaces and their creativity is more technically coherent and their storytelling more literate. Those who never studied the media are largely more reluctant to participate or to create work to disseminate across digital platforms. Successful media students have a more developed, specialist vocabulary to articulate their thoughts on media texts. However, this does not necessarily mean that that are any more instinctively critical. Most significantly, whilst the media students were able to respond to the civic/creative task with more aptitude, they were no more successful in generating an audience and were no more likely to engage in civic activism in the public sphere.

Addressing the need for a consistent media literacy assessment in all EU27 (emphasized by the EMEDUS project) and beyond, we argue the methodology developed in this study is transferable. Firstly, an online survey capturing the variety of participants’ media consumption and engagement (Access/Appreciation), uses the same tool applied by the European Commission when measuring “media literacy levels across a range of ages, education levels, income levels, access levels, and geographic locations” (see Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy Levels in Europe, European Commission, 2011b, 1). The study comments on its limitations, stating “[s]ince media literacy is part of everyday life and is associated with a variety of influences, contexts, and actions, surveys alone cannot provide a comprehensive assessment... [they] can only provide indications for further policy actions, and, therefore, other sources and approaches needs to be considered as well” (4). Thus more in-depth questioning at the individual-level is recommended, which is an approach adopted in the second stage of our methodology—a participant-observed and recorded textual analysis activity, followed by semi-structured interviews building on themes from the survey (Awareness/Assessment). Whereas the communicative abilities related to content creation are also to be evaluated through a survey in the case of the assessment developed by European Commission, we propose a more exploratory approach addressing the EU’s and UN’s interest in young people’s active participation and citizenship—a creative task with a civic engagement (Action). In summary, our three-stage methodology assesses the three areas of media literacy proposed by the European Commission (2011b)—use skills, critical understanding, and communicative abilities—yet in the more complex and in-depth mode as recommended.

Where media education is a cross-curricular subject (e.g. Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, or Slovakia), to differentiate between students with and without background in media education/studies can be more challenging, but still achievable. The Report on Formal Media Education in Europe (2014) and the intercultural media education study conducted by Zezulkova

(2014) both suggest it is possible to distinguish between individual schools and classrooms where strategic media education is actually being delivered and where it is not. Though research in these countries would require more strategic sampling, this can be achieved by including schools actively cooperating with a network, NGO or state/EU funded project facilitating media literacy related teacher training and producing resource materials (Hartai 2014). Since these groups often provide informal, afterschool, and extracurricular media education programs and projects (even in the countries where there is no formal media education), they represent another valuable sample source. The same applies to countries outside of the EU, where media education is part of formal curricular (e.g. Australia, Canada and New Zealand), or where informal media literacy courses are being delivered (e.g. First Star Academy offered by the Media Education Lab in the USA).

The choice of a media product for critical discussion—in this case a particular scene from the film, *Super Size Me!*—provides an opportunity to explore a topic commonly discussed in families and by publics across borders, thus suitable for both cross-cultural and cross-generational relevance. The Czech and US primary school pupils involved in the study by Zezulkova often referred to McDonald's as an example of both unhealthy lifestyle and unethical business and marketing practices. It would be interesting to group these primary school children based on their media education backgrounds and to discuss *Super Size Me!* with them. The same could be said about more than 100 other countries where McDonald's operates. The remaining half of the countries in the world can adopt the same method, but choose another media product with similar features.

From Literacy to (Civic) Capability

When people have ... media literacy competences, they recognize personal, corporate and political agendas and are empowered to speak out on behalf of missing voices and omitted perspectives in our communities (Hobbs 2010, 17).

Whilst our study has adopted media literacy as the 21st century “conduit” for civic activism, one of the implications of our findings is that media education pedagogy needs to facilitate capability in the public sphere, if the aspirations of Mihailidis, Hobbs and their European counterparts (including our UKLA group) are to be realized. Converting capabilities into “valued functionings” (see Sen 1999; Royle, Emira, and Jopling 2013) goes beyond the provision of resource and the “training” in use to make significant change, in a social justice framework, to skills, confidence, and attitudes. Our hypothesis for the extension of this study across Europe, in the first instance, is that we will find pockets of excellent practice in one or two of the strands for MIL development in a great number of cases; but empirical evidence of the increase in civic action, and the conversion of this into valued functioning in the digital public sphere for social justice will be harder to find. We must also be cautious to scaffold the civic participation of young people on their terms, to avoid at best tokenism and at worst exploitation:

Young people are actively required to exercise their responsibility as citizens, yet for many the traditional markers of citizenship have been ever more difficult to achieve, and in this context, participation may not be a meaningful practice—and may even prove to be an oppressive imposition (Buckingham, Bragg, and Kehily 2014, 280).

We concede we are guilty of this; the civic activity the students were required to undertake for this study was far from organic, it was forced upon them and they were incentivized to see it through. This, of course, is indicative of a broader dilemma—either the Media Studies curriculum fails to address the civic component of media literacy enough at all (as appears to be the case with the GCSE qualification under scrutiny here) or “social justice media production” interventions within educational programs or research projects like ours, that do include the “Action” stage can be (cynically, perhaps) accused of imposing empty practices. So the participant who makes a documentary about body image and posts it to the online abyss, then to be implicitly

criticized by the researchers for failing to convert this compliance with an obligation to meaningful collective action, would doubtless be better empowered by an intervention that can energize and encourage students to find more authentic ways of developing and expressing their politics and participating in the public sphere. Whether school is the place to achieve this is the bigger question.

Disclaimers stated, our findings build on the previous studies cited to suggest that a critical vocabulary, creative narrative aptitude, and basic participative confidence in media related networks can be—and are—enhanced by media education and Media Studies. With the significant risks of imposition and “othering” raised by Banaji and Buckingham in mind, and not conveniently bracketed, our community of practice’s agenda going forward should be to find and share pedagogic strategies for scaffolding a step up from these existing media literacy practices to a more ambitious and reciprocal civic capability.

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