



# Media Education, quo vadis?

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*It is not by chance that the perplexity of educational institutions and increasing medialization are often mentioned in the same breath when the topic of the educational crisis comes up. Hence the key questions are the goals of education, the required patterns of reflection and social configurations for generating knowledge, and the conditions of the digitally informed media culture. Against this background, the paper aims at presenting possible forward-looking arguments and perspectives of development in media education (Medienbildung).*

## I. Introduction

My first encounters with media education at university go back to my days as a university student in the nineties, when today's subject of "media studies" was still called "modern German literature and media". This referred largely to the study of how film, aside from adaptations of literary works, could be put to constructive use in German classes.

Teaching materials on film analysis were drafted, and on how to teach a basic knowledge of the historical development of a "cinematic language". In time, these school-related efforts petered out, the courses offered for the continuing education of teachers met with little, if any, interest.

Since that time, education about and with media has been gaining in contour and relevance, accompanied by social and technological transformations. That media education is not concerned with "the correct use of media technologies" and amounts to more than merely complaining about the increase of trivial, inferior or violent content, is not something I need elaborate here. Nor that our entry into a digital media culture also involves a change in the way educational processes are described and problematized.

In my work I try to bring up for discussion those disciplines which treat the topic of media education like media studies as well as pedagogy and to enhance the usefulness of the specific approaches taken by these disciplines. Hence the approaches, situational assessments and ideas for transforming learning culture related to media education, media and communication studies and information, as well as possibilities for intervention, all become relevant when we take up the question of "media education, where are you going?", that is, where media education is, can or should be heading.

To begin with, I would like present a brief review of the status quo regarding the disciplines involved, media education and media studies:

## **II. Media education**

We are now observing a differentiation of positions within media education, and I would first like to draw attention to two of these:

"Media education covers all questions related to the pedagogical significance of media as used in the areas of leisure time, education and occupation. Wherever media gain relevance for people's social situation by being used as means of information, influence, entertainment,

teaching and the organization of everyday life, they become the subject of media education." (Hüther/Schorb 2005: 265, translated by Missommelius) and

"Structural media education ... inquires after the educational potential of (new) media. These potentials are founded on the structure of media (mediality)." (Jörissen/Marotzki 2009, translated by Missommelius)

### **III. Media studies**

"All cultures are imparted through media. Therefore, cultures are also always media cultures and thus every study of culture must inevitably also address media. [...] Educational processes - processes involving the acquisition of culture by individuals, whether conscious or not - must therefore also always entail an engagement with the unique character of media in cultural communication. [...] Competence in terms of media culture and media education should facilitate a direct experience of the historical, social, cognitive and identity-forming esthetic and normative dimensions of media cultures in order to enable a type of participation in collective cultural production which is as well thought out as it is activity-oriented." (GfM 2012, translated by Missommelius). I would like to make use of the following remarks to expand on media education in terms of development concepts, taking the scientific study of medial culture in society as a starting point for media education.

### **IV. The relationship between medium and subject**

The discourses now ongoing in social and cultural studies reveal a dissolution of dichotomous categories of human/nature and technology, and thus also of subject and object in the observation and description of the digital realm. Hence the pedagogical idea of the subject and its constitution must be reconsidered and its theory brought into question when we reflect on the configurations in which the media cultures of the twenty-first century develop. If we look at these against the backdrop of

actor-network theory, we cannot but question the part played by the media architectures in which we move and thus the historical dimension, as well, which is also present in current and future developments.

Although media studies also works with various concepts of media derived from media theory, there is as yet no systematic reference to one media concept or other, and no reflection of the same in media education. Media competence theory is largely based on an understanding of media as an object for conveying content, used by an autonomous subject. However, when we take a look at how media determine education (Meder 2007), then they can no longer be conceived merely as an object, but rather as being directly involved in constituting education, thereby disclosing their close proximity to the concept of media culture as mentioned above.

In this context, it becomes clear why the study of media history is important: it illustrates the repeating cycles of processes of renewal in media technology along with their innovation rhetoric and promises of media-based revolutionary changes.

Understanding media use and media education is a profoundly political and socially relevant topic which goes far beyond questions of how tastes are formed. Here questions of media esthetics and media practices also play a part.

This can be made clear using the example of young people's online video cultures (especially on YouTube), the channels and formats which have recently brought forth youth cultures. A closer examination of these paradigmatic forms of digital media culture reveals transitions from the users' own productions to subsequent processing of existing media material (YouTube video cultures as paradigmatic forms of media cultures; a reevaluation of 'copying'). In this context, a media-pedagogical and media-theoretical analysis and reflection of esthetic practices, existing competences, as well as visual-esthetic, acoustic and narrative aspects, offers an opportunity of gaining perspective from a distance. At this distance, we can better realize the classification systems and scripts

provided by media, and better reflect on the meaning of media codes (such as the languages of pictures and films, or the logic of algorithms).

In view of the discourse in education policy concerning the field of computer science and the results of the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS), it may well be that an analysis of the Anglo-American point of reference known as computational thinking which is currently moving away from programming and teaching programming skills to focus on higher faculties unconnected to programming, could be of interest to media education, as well. Valentin Dander, for instance, suggests that media education should deal more productively with big data in the form of projects with open (government) data or at least active data work. Initial consideration is already being given to specifying and enabling data criticism (cf. Burkhardt/Gießmann 2014; Dander 2014a and 2014b).

At any rate, the social relevance of software to media education can no longer be denied, especially following the revelations of Edward Snowden regarding Prism and other surveillance systems. A more palpable manifestation in media-pedagogical practice is also necessary, for example, if we wish to see more thought put into the use and selection of software in educational practice. The political dimension of media use becomes especially evident in this connection.

## V. Learning with media

The pragmatic use of media in teaching / learning scenarios informed by media studies is aware of the fact that there are fixed roles in media educational structures, and is also theoretically reflected and founded in the use of software and hardware.

Negative examples of the use of software in educational contexts can be seen in Austria, for instance, in the introduction of the "Sokrates' Bund" central school administration system in 2014-2015, which transmits and processes (unencrypted) data on students via the Internet. A problematic or even irresponsible handling of data in educational institutions can be

observed, as is also demonstrated by the introduction of the centralized final examinations ("Zentralmatura") at schools in Austria, which allowed the test results of hundreds of thousands of Austrian students to find their way into the hand of third parties (cf Kaiser-Müller/Ruge/Swertz 2014).

When media are used for learning, issues of (media) education are also political issues

In these words, Claudia Bremer of Studiumdigitale expresses her worries about the spread of Learning Analytics, which is currently accelerating and is also predicted by the Horizon Report to increase rapidly (Bremer 2015). When it comes to educational policy, there are hopes that this will enable mass processing without any glitches. However, could it be that a data-driven method of assessment which accommodates learners individually in adaptive learning systems and entails no resistance, since problem-solving behavior that was successful in the past is constantly reconfirmed (someone who is good at quizzes does nothing else), that such a method will in the end merely result in a "watered-down" form of learning? Apart from this, there are various players with clear commercial interests who are waiting for it to be definitively implemented. Finally, Claudia Bremer asks about the consequences of data-driven learning analyses: to what extent do they change the selection of learning media and didactic approaches?

As far as the institutional framing of efforts in media education is concerned, the main focus at present is (still) on the areas of school and occasionally university education, and far less on non-institutional areas of education, such as advanced vocational training – which is increasingly being practiced exclusively as e-learning – as well as occupational training, adult education and youth work. Here, too, there are challenges to be met along the future path of media education – along with a large number of players who are now crowding into the field of media education, such as software corporations and private-sector educational initiatives.

## VI. What objectives does media education generate?

Another dimension concerning the question "Why media education?" is the target of efforts in media education. What objective can media education tie in with to increase its educational potential in media culture? Have we really managed to bid farewell to the conservative educational attitude, or in other words, why is it so hard to shift away from a mentality concerned with pedagogical doubts, reservations and angst-inducing scenarios (which seems to exhaust itself in endlessly harping on the topics of cyber mobbing and Internet addiction) and move toward current problems, such as informational self-determination, and coping with uncertainty and complexity?

What part is being played by the aim of educational efforts today? Even at the university level, education has now come to mean enabling apathetic students to collect certificates and degrees for the primary purpose of gaining commercial and monetary benefit on the job market, while the idea of using education to benefit their own lives is of secondary interest, at best. This suggests that critical thinking is going to have some difficult terrain to cross. What forms and practices of subversive knowledge can be mobilized? Is criticism from within even possible in media culture?

I would like to submit the following suggestion to promote the ability to act responsibly and critically with regard to digital media:

This suggestion takes up an idea for art education which Torsten Meyer conceived in the wake of Cultural Hacking (Düllo/Liebl 2005) for his Next Art Education:

"The hero of the next society, the trustee of culture and exemplary ideal for educational projects, is no longer the Enlightenment intellectual appealing to public reason, no longer the critic who is able expertly to compare the real with the ideal, in brief: no longer the sovereign subject of Modernism, but rather the hacker." (Meyer 2015, translated by Missomelius)

By no means is this a matter of illegal goings-on or using media for harmful purposes (i.e. cracking), but instead, it refers to a form of playful media activism involving a command of the codes and types of functional logic related to media. It is a matter of understanding how to make use of various kinds of functional logic, cultural scripts and codes of media culture. In this perspective, strategies for obstructing surveillance and control, such as counterveillance or sousveillance, would be considered processes of empowerment in the sense of informational self-determination.

Without doubt, the approaches of the specific disciplines differ in many respects, whether in their theoretical aspirations and basic theoretical approaches, in their assessment of the concept of media, in the question of their subject or in the methods and reference disciplines they utilize. Hence adopting a view that embraces multiple perspectives can possibly put questions in more concrete terms and more clearly formulate problems, thereby meeting the need for reflection in relation to media.

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