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Critical Media Literacy in Media Education: A Debate on the Contribution to Democracy

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The convergence of media and technology in a global culture is changing the way we learn about the world and challenging the very foundations of education. Today, the general trend concerning the main stream media literacy has focused more on the protectionist approach. This study is aimed at discussing the importance of a critical citizenship awareness by media literacy. It is argued that critical citizenship and participative democracy are not able to acquire without seeing the ownership structure of media in the capitalist system. This study was based on cultural studies, political-economy and critical pedagogy theories where the concept of media literacy was discussed as a combination of approaches of critical media and pedagogy.

Keywords*:* Critical media literacy, media criticism, citizenship, democracy, critical pedagogy

The media is involved in all aspects of social life together with technological changes. Media texts are reached to audience by different communication tools such as movies, television, newspapers, internet, video clips and advertising. In line with this change, the media have an important role in the people's thoughts and behaviors and the formation of value judgments. These changes in technology, media, and society require the development of critical media literacy to empower students and citizens to adequately read media messages and produce media themselves in order to be active participants in a democratic society (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Thompson (1995) defines the means of information and communication as a symbolic power. Media instutions are oriented towards the large-scale production and generalized diffusion of symbolic forms in space and time. These and other cultural institutions such as: religious institutions, schools, universities, etc. have provided important bases for the accumulation of the means of information and communication, as well as material and financial resources, and have shaped the ways in which information and symbolic content are produced in the social world. Thompson has characterized communication as a distinctive kind of

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social activity which involves the production, transmisson and reception of symbolic forms and the implementation of resources of various kinds. The first characteristic of mass communication is that it involves certain technical and institutional means of production and diffusion while the second is the commodification of symbolic forms. In other words, the development of mass communication is inseperable from the development of the media industries. Today, in the face of strong influence of the media, the concept of media literacy has been debated not to expose individuals to effects of media. It is essential to the success of democracy that young people consciously and consistently analyze and evaluate media messages. Communications should be trained to receive current, accurate, and credible sources of information and their use by means of various techniques of mass communication. Without these critical skills there is a risk losing the diversity and freedom of thought that underpins a culture of true democracy.

The convergence of media and technology in a global culture is changing the way we learn about the world and challenging the very foundations of education. No longer it is enough to be able to read the printed word; children, youth, and adults need the ability to critically interpret the powerful images of a multimedia culture. Media literacy education provides a framework and a pedagogy for the new literacy needed for living, working, and citizenship in the 21st century. Critics of the commercialization of schools and culture take issue with the way in which an unreflective adoption of popular media in schools ultimately fosters the global consumerist identity promoted by much of that media. Such a 'consumer citizen' identity contradicts and has the potential to overwhelm more democratic ideals of citizenship that schools have traditionally fostered. Rather than ban the popular from classrooms, however, most advocate supplementing it with lessons in critical media literacy through which students learn to contextualize and deconstruct commercial texts (Ferguson, 2011).

Critical media literacy approach is based on both critical theories in social research and critical pedagogy in the field of education. Binark and Bek (2007) argue, the more radical approach that deals with the concepts of criticism and citizenship is needed in media literacy education. The harmful content must not be limited only by violence and pornography. Especially, it is observed that there are a representation issues such as sexism, racism and an incitement to war in Turkish media. In the framework of these issues, it is required to be developed a new approach. Critical media literacy includes reading variety and different media texts, affecting media messages with audience's viewpoint and producing media texts.

All media messages are constructed. Media have been a basic part of the hegemonic culture. The effects of media on society are crucial in terms of both mainstream and critical media approaches. Each approach examines the relationship of media and society by its own framework. Mainstream approaches have seen the media as an objective and autonomous structure, whereas critical approaches have emphasized the aspects of ideological and economical of media and have debated that the dominant ideology is reproduced by media. As a result, the teaching of media literacy has been seen within mainstream media approaches.

Critical media literacy provides an opportunity for seeing inequalities such as class, gender, ethnicity in media texts. While the mainstream media literacy contains protection to the adolescents in the face of the negative influences of media, it disregards injustices which

are reproduced by itself. In this study, it is argued that the students should learn to criticize the dominant media culture and rethink the concept of media literacy within critical approaches and to emphasize the importance of being participant citizen. The real democracy is possible by the critical viewpoint. The teaching of media literacy has been debated in the axes of cultural studies, critical political economy, critical pedagogy and radical democracy theories. Thus, it is indicated that the media education is very important in cultivating of citizens who have awareness of the democracy.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Media literacy was seen as teaching children about media—how advertising works or how to analyze the news telecast. In her book Literacy in a Digital World: Teaching and Learning in the Age of Information, Kathleen Tyner (1998) posited that media education is more about education than it is about media. For Tyner, media education 'expands literacy to include reading and writing through the use of new and emerging communication tools. It is learning that demands the critical, independent and creative use of information' (p. 196). Defining media literacy is the central conceptual issue. It is a term that has been used to cover a great deal of conceptual ground with both 'media' and 'literacy' being contested terms. Media literacy has been treated as a public policy issue, a critical cultural issue, as a set of pedagogical tools for elementary school teachers, suggestions for parents or as a topic of scholarly inquiry from a physiological cognitive, or anthropological tradition (Christ & Potter, 1998, p.7). The concept of literacy includes 'gaining skills and knowledge to read, interpret, and produce certain types of texts and artifacts and to gain intellectual tools and capacities to fully participate in one's culture and society' (Kellner & Share, 2005, p.369).

According to Teurlings (2010, p.361), the goal of media literacy described in terms of individual abilities, there is also a tendency to think of society as a collection of citizens rather than, say, workers or gay people. In this, the liberal approach shows its roots in democratic theory, with society envisaged as a collection of formally equal subjects. Conflicts between citizens or even groups of citizens may arise, but they are non-essential, since the system guarantees the proper way of handling such conflicts: the pluralist model of society underpinning democratic theory. In terms of media literacy, this means that liberal approaches do problematize the role of media in society, but they find their answers in individual solutions that are to be found at the side of the viewers or consumers solely. If only people would be educated enough, so the argument goes, all would be well. It is precisely at this point that the radical approach to media literacy differs. Hence in the radical project, it is not sufficient to educate people; what really matters is the next step: namely, to promote the desire to change the media system. In the radical media literacy approach, it is focused on the process of media production and the value of critical political economy.

While the concept of media literacy is related to analysing and reading of the media texts, the 'critical media literacy' approach consists of critical analysis of media representations and stresses 'the importance of learning to use media as modes of self-expression and social activism' (Kellner, 1998, p.113). Thoman and Jolls (2004, p.25-27) have emphasized the key

points within the media literacy process. Accordingly, all media messages are constructed. Contrary to popular opinion, media are not windows on the world, nor are they even mirrors reflecting the real world. Media messages are presented using a creative language with its own rules. Understanding the grammar, syntax, and metaphor system of media, especially visual language, not only contains manipulation but also increases audience's appreciation and enjoyment of media as constructed cultural products. Moreover, the values and the ideas are embedded in media. Media messages are influenced by money, political power, or ideology. In the framework of media literacy education, it should be thought why media message was sent.

Lewis and Jhally (1998, p.109-113) argued that media literacy should be about helping people to become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers. The mass media should be understood as more than a collection of texts to be deconstructed and analyzed so that people can distinguish or choose among them. Media education should teach students to engage media texts, but it should also teach them to engage and challenge media institutions. The politics of media texts become more tangible if they are seen as produced by real people for specific purposes. If this seems a perilously political approach, it is no less so than allowing students to see the media only on their own terms. The media canon is a product of a purely commercial rationale. Just as political education allows citizens to think more critically and constructively about politics, media literacy can provide people with the wherewithal for thinking about the limits and possibilities of media systems. The media education should provide students to imagine ways of changing media systems and create the possibility of a more democratic media.

O'Neill (2010, p.323, 335) points out that alternative discourse of media literacy is fundamental a human right. Media literacy education has made an important contribution to raising awareness of communication rights and promoting an understanding of media literacy as a social and not just individual competence. It needs to integrate human rights awareness within media literacy. It involves the right balance between freedom of expression, privacy and children's rights, making children and adults more aware of their respective rights and potential infringements of the rights of others. Kellner and Share (2005, p.374-376) indicated that the Center for Media Literacy identified five core concepts concerning media literacy. The first core concept is that all media messages are constructed. The second core concept is that media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules. The third core concept is that different people experience the same media message. The fourth core concept focuses on the actual content of media messages in order to question ideology, bias, and the connotations explicit and implicit in the representation. Cultural studies, feminist theory, and critical pedagogy offer the research in order to question media representations of race, class, gender, and so on. The fifth concept is that media are organized to gain profit and power.

The mainstream media literacy efforts represent a protectionist approach with an attempt to protect children from the negative aspects of media. Therefore, these efforts mostly focus on only one aspect of media literacy to provide critical readings of the media messages, while the issues of participation and involvement of children in the process of

media production are widely disregarded the process. In this context, the individuals are defined as the passive receivers and active consumers of the media messages; yet they are not provided with the opportunity to raise their voice about their concerns and opinions. Crticial media education through participation in the process carries potential to promote ideas of multiculturalism and diversity; therefore media literacy is not only a matter of perceiving media messages, but also an opportunity for transforming the media (Oðuzhan and Haydari, 2011, p.2831). Media literacy is a educational process which provides participation and freedom of communication. The media literacy education has become mandatory in the context of globalizm, deregulation, and privatization. It is possible to create a democratic society by developing societal justice through media literacy. The perspective of media literacy must contain societal equality differently from the mainstream protectionist approach.

Kellner and Share (2007, p. 6-8) indicate the four approaches in the media education: Protectionist approach, media arts education, media literacy movement, and critical media literacy. Accordingly, the protectionist approach aims to protect people against the dangers of media manipulation and addiction. The media arts education approach covers teaching of the aesthetic qualities of media. Third approach to media education has emerged from in USA. Media literacy movement approach contains the skills of access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate. Fourth approach which is the critical media literacy focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of gender, race, class, and sexuality. A critical media literacy tackles with the issues such as ideology, the relationships between media and capital.

Critical Media Literacy and Democratic Citizenship

Critical sociology has emphasized the social reproductive function of curriculum. It identifies curriculum as a fundamental mechanism through which the hegemonic discourse of the dominant classes becomes embedded in our institutions of education, and transmitted to students as authority. Apple (2004) has pointed out that the development of curriculum is not simply an exercise of class (or patriarchal, racialized, heteronormative, etc.) rule. Curricula, and education policy more generally, are developed within a set of liberal democratic institutions in which non-elite educators, often relying on a scientific discourse about the technical efficacy of certain pedagogies over others, are able to make their voices heard. Education includes a hegemonic control and reproduces important aspects of inequality in the economic sector of society. Schools exist through their relations to other more powerful institutions, institutions that are combined in such a way as to generate structural inequalities of power and access to resources. According to Bek and Binark (2007, p.103), "A citizen who is a critical media literate will read conventions and dominant codes inserted into the circulation of media texts as well as become aware of their roots in everyday life".

Critical media literacy constitutes a critique of mainstream approaches to literacy and a political project for democratic social change. It provides a multiperspectival critical inquiry of media culture involving issues of class, race, gender, sexuality, and power and it also promotes the production of alternative counter-hegemonic media (Kellner & Share,

2007, p.9). Critical media literacy has been shaped by two approaches: Critical thinking and critical pedagogy. The idea of critical pedagogy begins with the neo-Marxian literature on critical theory. The early critical theorists (most of whom were associated with the Frankfurt School) believed that Marxism had underemphasized the importance of cultural and media influences for the persistence of capitalism; that maintaining conditions of ideological hegemony were important for (in fact inseparable from) the legitimacy and smooth working of capitalist economic relations. Critical pedagogy represents the reaction of progressive educators against such institutionalized functions. It is an effort to work within educational institutions and other media to raise questions about inequalities of power, about the false myths of opportunity. The task of critical pedagogy is to bring members of an oppressed group to a critical consciousness of their situation as a beginning point of their liberatory praxis (Burbules & Berk, 1999).

Kellner and Share (2005, p.372) emphasize the importance of critical standpoint. Cultural studies and critical pedagogy emphasize to comprehend the media industry in contemporary society, the growing trends towards multicultural and pluralist society. Critical media literacy teaches students to discuss media manipulation, and to use media products in constructive ways. It provides being developed skills that will help create good citizens and that will make individuals more motivated and competent participants in social life. Critical media literacy presents an opportunity to develop critical perspective against dominant media meanings, stereotypes, values, and ideologies generated by media texts. According to Ýnal (2009), first of all, to be media literate require to know the structural properties of the media as well as technical (property, ideological position, the cultural point of view, etc.). A person as a media literate obtain the ability of correct reading to media. The act of reading of media texts (a TV appearance, newspaper headlines, magazine article, radio newsletter, etc.) provides critical analysis of media texts by wide and variety perspectives. In this respect, the media literate is not passive media audiences, an active participant.

Stuart Hall (1982) demonstrates the power of hegemony to shape ideology within the culture industry but stresses the importance of television and its representational power to this end and describes the role of the media in the reproduction of dominant, hegemonic ideologies. According to Hall, the media, in dealing with contentious public or political issues, would be rightly held to be partisan, if they systematically adopted the point of view of a particular political party or of a particular section of capitalist interests. It is only in so far as these parties or interests have aquired legitimate ascendancy in the state, and that ascendancy has been legitimately secured through the formal exercise of the 'will of the majority' that their strategies can be represented as coincident with the 'national interest' and therefore form the legitimate basis or framework which the media can assume.

According to Ferguson (2011), it is not adequate to focus on the cultural differencies. That is, while differences in food, dress, sporting and other cultural traditions are promoted, respected and celebrated, the arguably more intransigent material differences (around income, employment, education and housing for instance) slip or are pushed below the radar. Whatever the value of acknowledging cultural diversity, in emphasizing diversity over real difference or cultural relations over political-economic relations—the concept of multiculturalism depoliticizes

our vision of culture and the public sphere more generally. As noted by Tisdell, "the media portray only the dominant culture, which is then seen as "normal"; whereas those not of the dominant culture are often seen as "other." A way of potentially facilitating transformative learning through greater interaction is by encouraging students to develop a critical media literacy activity for use with others" (2008, p.61).

It should be considered to promote a vibrant vision of democracy, how to be taught matters as much, if not more, than what to be taught. In creating a learning environment that promotes democracy, it is important to embody principles of democracy in classrooms (Share and Thoman, 2007). A media literacy curriculum that asks students to apply similar conventions to popular culture with respect to the representations and voices of women and ethno-racialized minorities suffers similar limitations. The implicit value promoted here is the visibilization of diversity, which is taken as evidence of equality, and thus neutrality. The just, multicultural society in this scenario is one that overcomes symbolic discrimination by promoting equal/neutral representations, and a free and open flow of information and voices. However, such a vision is problematic. It systematically conceals structural inequalities in political and economic relations – and, like the mainstream press, in so doing, deploys the very language of equality (Herman and Chomsky, 2002). Ferguson (2011) argues that the model of civic citizenship promoted by the critical media literacy curriculum, however, fails in its ambitions to provide a counterweight to the neo-liberal model of consumer citizenship. Accordingly, it only weakly challenges, and is unlikely to displace, the post-Keynesian-era model of citizenship education in which the values of universality and inclusiveness are subsumed to an ethos that naturalizes the practices and moral codes of the marketplace. Today's critical media literacy curriculum is intended to cut against such an identity, by providing students with the language and concepts to generate an alternative understanding of the self and others—an understanding more in line with the social citizenship model.

Hobbs (1998) indicates that more and more citizens are alienated from the political process. Hobbes mentions that there are three major ways in which media literacy can contribute to strengthening the democracy. First, media literacy practices help to strengthen students' information access, analysis and communication skills. Media literacy informs students about how the press functions in a democracy. Secondly, media literacy support the educational environments in which students can practice the skills of leadership, free and responsible self-expression, conflict resolution and consensus-building. Third, media literacy skills inspires young people to become more interested in increasing their access to diverse sources of information. Macedo (2007) argues the media as a propaganda apparatus succeed to the degree that people willingly engage in the construction of not seeing by ignoring the already highly feeble democratic institutions and the unjust, assymetrical power relations that characterize the hypocritical nature of contemporary democracies. As noted by Herman, "The media claim to be seeking truth and serving the public (not corporate and elite) interest. That should be standard by which we evaluate and criticize them as we seek to shrink the immense gap between their own proclaimed ideal and actual performance" (2007, p.34).

Conclusion

In the contemporary context, the modern public sphere and public discourse cannot be separated from the mass media. Public opinion has been facilitated by various forms of media. Particularly, the internet has been heralded a new public sphere which opened new

channels for political communication and public discourse. Much of the world's mass media today has been developed as money making enterprises and continue to operate today as commercial businesses. It should be considered that there is a commercial influence over the news and entertainment media. Since all media messages are constructed, it influences values and points of view. The dominant values about gender, race, social class and lifestyles have become embedded in a television show, a news program, a movie, or an advertisement. The production of meaning in the media always occurs within a wider political and economic context in which those with greatest social power can most easily access and manipulate the forces of hegemonic reproduction. The liberal approach to media literacy sees the politics as a matter of individuals. It is possible to say that the lack of critical viewpoint is a result of neoliberal media policies. Generally, the youngs and adults are not aware of how media operates. In this case, the task of critical media literacy is to show emerging knowledge of the production process in capitalist society. It should be provided that the students can think beyond the existing broadcasting structures and practices. Critical media literacy requires to ask questions about the conflicts and inequalities that led to the particular representations of different groups, and to their unequal representations in the first place.

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