Media Education and Media Literacy: Conceptualising the significance of critical and twenty-first-century literacies in media education

Neelatphal Chanda[*]

ABSTRACT

Under the wider array of media education, the role of media literacy has become significant. It enables the students to critically understand the nature, techniques and impacts of media messages and productions. At present situation, the role of media education is not about having the right answers: rather, it is more about asking questions. The task of media educators is not only limited to impart knowledge but to be a key facilitator in building the process of inquiry and dialogue. A key challenge for twenty-first century learning is to locate and evaluate true information for one's needs. It depends on the media educators, that how they adopt the pedagogical approaches which would help to encourage critical thinking and creative production of meanings in the minds of students while responding to their curiosity and adventures of discovery in collaborative and exploratory practices of media production. Under this gamut of media literacy pedagogy Douglas Kellner believes media pedagogy is a common term for practitioners, which emphasis often on the social and contextual aspect of teaching media literacy. Whereas Renee Hobbs and Richard Frost gives emphasis on media literacy instruction, which signify the role of distinct instructional strategies over and above reflection on the system itself. This paper will be an attempt to understand various viewpoints associated with media literacy. It also analyzes media education with the conceptual framework of media literacy. It also highlights the significance of critical and twenty-first century literacy's instructions in media literacy pedagogy. To carry out this study the researcher will analyze various literatures associated with media education, media literacy and emerging pedagogies associated with critical, and twenty-first century literacy.

Keywords: Media education, Pedagogy, Media literacy, Critical literacy, Twenty-first-century literacy.

Analyzing Media Education with the perspective of Media Literacy

"Education either functions as an instrument which is used facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world." Paulo Friere (1996)

In this age of twenty-first century media education underwent rapid changes and it has received new attention. Analyzing media education with the conceptual framework of media literacy promotes understanding of the structures, mechanisms and messages of the mass media. Generally, media literacy education aims to make media consumers aware of the media environments and increase critical thinking about media representations (Silverbatt, 2008; Hobbs, 2011). Media education should impart skills that help in developing independent capacity to apply critical judgment to media content. There are instances when media education and media literacy used interchangeably. Media education is the activities that take place in media oriented classroom. The more a student learns about or through the media, the more media literacy he/she will have: media literacy enables them with the skills of experiencing, analyzing media products. Media education is part of basic

entitlement of every citizen, in every country in the world, to freedom of expression and the right to information and is instrumental in building and sustaining democracy (UNESCO, 1999).

In this era where information comes around us through powerful images and sounds, those images and sounds have their own grammar. To understand the meaning, the pupil should be competent enough to comprehend the meaning generated from those images and sounds. Within the broader structure of media education, media literacy helps in enabling pupil to evaluate and analyze the endless stream of media messages they experience. Hobbs (2011) tends to stress the importance of enquiry as the correct path to engagement rather than the mere transmission of knowledge. More and more enquiry about any knowledge will promote deeper understanding of the concept and simultaneously the students will have critical consciousness. The core concept of media education is representation. Most of the media messages do not reflect reality rather it represents. "Media education is based on an

[*]Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, Assam University (A Central University)

assumption of media non-transparency, on an assumption that the media shape the subjects they present in characteristic forms. From the assumption that the media represent, rather than reflect reality, all else flows (Masterman, 1997)".

Within the purview of media education the essence of media literacy is to build higher-order of critical and creative thinking skills- such as identifying key concepts, making connections between multiple ideas, asking relevant questions, identify false belief with the expanded notion of literacy that form the very foundation of intellectual freedom and the exercising of responsible citizenship in a democratic society.

Viewpoints associated with Media Literacy

"At the heart of media literacy is the principle of inquiry."

Elizabeth Thoman, Founder / Center for Media Literacy

The world of mediated messages uses complex audio/visual languages which has its own grammar and can be interpreted in divergent viewpoints but it is the responsibility of media educators to develop the sense of critical consciousness among the students by which they can redefine the texts in a more meaningful manner. Media literacy helps those students to navigate within the ocean of innumerable messages and it would help them to develop the principle of inquiry and critically evaluate those messages received from different forms of media.

Basically the world of media literacy is divided into two dominant schools of thought: protectionist and empowerment. Protectionist school is grounded on the works of Digital literacy expert David Buckingham. This school defines media literacy in line with the leading authority in the protectionist media education. W. James. Potter is the leading figure in the field of protectionist media literacy. Potter's works heavily emphasizes on media effects, and media violence. W. James. Potter (2014) defines media literacy as, "a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the mass media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter". The protectionist approach to media literacy looks at the need to be critical media consumers in order to take control of the media messages we are surrounded by.

Henry Jenkins and Renee Hobbs are the key figures associated with the empowerment school. This approach to media literacy emphasizes young people as capable, resilient and active in their choices as both media consumers and as creative producers. Empowerment school of media literacy defines media literacy largely in line with the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE). They consider media literacy empowers people to be both critical thinkers and creative producers. It also initiates that young people experience as media consumers and as media makers.

Arguing on the significance of media literacy. McChesney (2002) says, "The problem we face with a hyper-commercial, profit obsessed media system is that it does a lousy job of producing citizens in a democracy. A solution is real media literacy education that doesn't just make people more informed consumer of commercial fare, but makes them understand how and why the media system works- so they may be critics, citizens and active participants."

Stressing on the need to critically interpret the powerful images in multimedia culture. Elizabeth Thoman and Tessa Jolls (2005) says, "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 is it enough to be able to read the printed word; children, youth, and adults, too, need the ability to both critically interpret the powerful images of a multimedia culture and express themselves in multiple media forms. Media literacy education provides a framework and pedagogy for the new literacy needed for living, working and citizenship in the 21st century. Moreover it paves the way to mastering the skills required for lifelong learning in a constantly changing world."

Nurturing critical citizenship and encouraging marginal voices to create counter discourses, Criticos (2001) observes, "Teaching media literacy facilitates critical citizenship and encourages marginal voices to produce counter discourses. Creative counter narratives that embody the wisdom of regional sustainable practices will be the key to envisioning a sustainable future."

Media Literacy Pedagogy: Critical and Twenty-first Century Media Literacy

While teaching media literacy in classroom, the media literacy educators are concerned with the ways to define media literacy content pedagogy, or pedagogy that reflects media literacy subject knowledge.

According to Elizabeth Thoman (2003), media literacy is grounded, on several core principles which are co-related with each other: (1) Media are constructions with unique language; (2) Media construct social reality; (3) Media have commercial and political implications; (4)

Audiences negotiate meaning in media; (5) Media contain ideological and value messages.

The most widely accepted circulating definition of media literacy involves the ability to 'decode, evaluate, analyze, and produce both print and electronic media' (Aufderheide, 1993).

In this age of mediated messages, there is a too much stuff cramming on the minds of the students. The media literacy guides those students to read and interpret those texts in a more meaningful manner. The media literacy pedagogy should be ingrained towards problem-posing and constructivist teaching that nurtures learning to identify, evaluate, and analyze codes and conventions of typographic and post-typographic mediated texts.

Media pedagogy is a common term for practitioners, with emphasis often on the social, contextual aspects of teaching media literacy (Kellner, 1998). The closest reference to media literacy pedagogy comes in the form of media literacy instruction (Hobbs & Frost, 1998, 2003), which puts emphasis on distinct instructional strategies over and above reflection on the instruction itself. Whereas Fenstermacher & Richardson (2005) argues that there is a connection of quality teaching with media literacy learning. Quality teaching can be developed as good teaching and successful teaching in terms of the combination of tasks and achievement. They also claim that the quality of any teaching can be evaluated based on the extent to which teaching involves task- or learner-sensitive and achievement- or learner-dependent orientation toward particular knowledge. As per the prism of quality teaching, not only the content should be proper and appropriate, the processes of teaching have to be morally defensible. The whole paradigm of media literacy pedagogy within the scope of quality teaching would engage students in ethical teaching of media which some media literacy educators might call 'critical media literacy instruction'. With the critical media literacy, students are going to learn about various ways in which they interpret the texts but it also enables them to understand the underlying power structures that are associated with media codes and convention.

The critical media literacy pedagogy takes into account two distinct media instruction forms-critical media literacy instruction and twenty-first-century literacy instruction. The critical media literacy instruction has its root from Frankfurt and cultural studies tradition. Critical media literacy instruction in media literacy develop skills in 'analyzing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies , and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts'(Kellner & Share, 2005). In addition many media studies scholars trace the literary roots of critical media literacy instruction to the cultural studies. They believe culture as the unit of analysis to engage in a form of analytical thinking that is commonly known as 'the politics of representation' (Hall, 1997). They advocate in order to teach critical media literacy; educators may encourage students to work from cultural studies forms of analysis.

The critical media literacy pedagogy not only challenges the codes and conventions in mediated messages but it also promotes the ways in which the media texts might be taught in the classroom. Kellner and Share (2005) observe that 'a student-centered, bottom-up approach is necessary with the student's own culture, knowledge and experiences forming the basis for the collaborative inquiry and video production that can be ways for students to voice their discoveries.' The critical media literacy pedagogy promotes the idea of connected teaching in which students and technologies are co-facilitators in instruction of analysis of media.

The new/twenty-first century media literacy instruction focuses more on the ways in which new media re-inscribe, expand and, in many instances formulate new methods in media literacy pedagogy format. In other words, those literacy skills such as viewing and writing and listening may be increasingly compromised or enhanced by Web 2.0 networks where end-user writer access questions who ultimately is the author of a particular text (Kist, 2005). New literacy theorists tend to look at how the rise in modern technologies shaped by the social and psycholinguistic contexts helps media literacy learning and teaching.

Again, there is a subtle difference between new and twenty-first century media literacy pedagogical perspectives. The twenty-first century literacy's instruction tends more for the rise in technology tools saturation of the digital age, whereas new literacy theorists tried to look more at how the rise in the use of new technology shaped by social contexts.

Conclusion

Through the above article it is evident that media literacy's role has become significant in the age of mediated messages. It enables the students of media studies to deconstruct the powerful images and sounds in a more meaningful manner. In media education with the prism of media literacy

educators and the pupil may frame questions about dominant values, review choices of media carefully, navigate information from reliable sources and ponder critically while creating media texts. The key components associated with the media literacy in the gamut of media education is to develop critical thinking skills, understand how media messages shape our culture and society, recognize biasness and misinformation in mediated messages, creating and distributing own media messages and advocating for media justice.

The field of media literacy education has emerged as a significant platform to organize and promote the teachings of this expanded notion of literacy. Masterman (1997) writes that media education will inevitably lead to improved citizenship and social change, and Ewen (1996) agrees that media literacy should be viewed as "an education in techniques that can democratize the realm of public expression and will magnify the possibility of meaningful public interactions".

Through evolving pedagogical approaches, more and more media educators are helping to identify key concepts, building sense of critical inquiry, identifying delusions, which help in building critical citizenry among the students. By combining pedagogy with media literacy, it helps to foreground theory and practice, task and achievement, learning and teaching. Both the pedagogues' foregrounds on the content versus process debate in media literacy education and it helps in shaping core skills associated with basic media competency and critical media literacy.

References

Aufderheide, P. (1993) Media Literacy: a report of the national leadership conference on media literacy. Aspen, CO: Aspen Institute.

Costas Criticos (2001). Media Education for a Critical Citizenry in South Africa In Robert Kubey (ed.) Media Literacy in an Information Age; New Brunswick; NJ: Transaction.

Ewen, S. (1996). *PR! A social history of spin* (1st Ed.). New York: Basic Books.

Fenstermacher, G.D. & Richardson, V. (2005). On Making Determinations of Quality in Teaching, Teachers College Record, 107(1), 186-213.

Friere, P. (1996). Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

Guide to Media Literacy Education". CML MediaLit Kit.

Hall, S. (1997). Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices. London: Sage/Open University.

Hobbs, R. & Frost, R. (2003). Measuring the Acquisition of Media-Literacy Skills, Reading Research Quarterly, 38(3), 330-355.

Hobbs, R. (2011). "The state of media literacy: A response to Potter." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media 55(3),* 419-430.

House, 76(6), 278-283. Retrieved on 26.05.2017 http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/098650309602019

Kellner, D. & Share, J. (2005). Toward Critical Media Literacy: core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy, Discourse, 26(3), 369-386. http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1080/ 01596300500200169.

Kellner, D. (1998). Multiple Literacies and Critical Pedagogy in a Multicultural Society, Educational Theory, 48(1), 103-122. Retrieved on 20.12.2016 from http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1111/j.1741-5446.1998.00103.x.

Kist, W. (2005). New Literacy's in Action: teaching and learning in multiple media. New York: Teachers College Press.

Materman, L. (1997). A rationale in media education. In R.W. Kubey (Ed.), *Media literacy in the information age: Current perspectives, information and behavior* (pp. 15-68). New Brunswick, N.J. : Transaction.

McChesney, R. W. (2002). Keynote. Presented at the founding conference of Action Coalition for Media Education, Alburquerque, USA.

Potter, W. (2014). Media literacy (7th Ed.). Washington DC: SAGE.

Silverblatt, A. (2008). Media literacy: keys to interpreting messages (3rd ed.). Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

Thoman, E. (2003). Media Literacy: a guided tour of the best resources for teaching, The Clearing .

Thoman. E and Jolls, T. (2005). "Literacy for the 21st Century: An Overview and Orientation

UNESCO (1999). Recommendations Addressed to the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization UNESCO, pp. 273-274.

Westbrook, N. (2011). "*Media Literacy Pedagogy: critical and new/twenty-first-century literacies instruction".* E-Learning and Digital Media, Vol. 8, No. 2. Pennsylvania.